

RECLAIMING THE FUNERAL: USING RITUAL  
TO HELP THE COMMUNITY COPE  
WITH GRIEF AND LOSS

Matthew B. Zuehlke

B.A., Guilford College, 2000  
M.Div., Earlham School of Religion, 2006

Mentor  
A. D. Washington, D.Min.

A FINAL DOCUMENT SUBMITTED TO  
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
TROTWOOD, OH  
December, 2009



**United Theological Seminary  
Dayton, Ohio**

**Faculty Approval Page  
Doctor of Ministry Final Project**

Reclaiming the Funeral: Using Ritual

to Help the Community Cope

with Grief and Loss

by

Matthew B. Zuehlke

United Theological Seminary, 2009

Mentor

A. D. Washington, D. Min.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Mentor(s):

\_\_\_\_\_

Director, Doctoral Studies

## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vi
DEDICATION .....	ix
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER	
1. SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY.....	5
2. THE ROAD TO HEALING.....	33
3. FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUNERAL.....	36
4. METHODOLOGY AND STRATEGY.....	75
5. FIELD EXPERIENCE.....	77
6. REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION.....	119
APPENDIX	
A. SERMON: A BLUE CHRISTMAS.....	122
B. WORKSHOP HANDOUT.....	128
C. WORKSHOP PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE.....	135
D. PROFILE INVENTORY RESULTS OF WORKSHOP PRE- QUESTIONNAIRE.....	139
E. WORKSHOP POST-QUESTIONNAIRE.....	143

F.	PROFILE INVENTORY RESULTS OF WORKSHOP POST- QUESTIONNAIRE.....	146
G.	A LIST OF COMMENTS SHARED DURING THE RITUAL EXERCISE.....	149
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....		151

## **ABSTRACT**

# **RECLAIMING THE FUNERAL: USING RITUAL TO HELP THE COMMUNITY COPE WITH GRIEF AND LOSS**

by

Matthew B. Zuehlke

United Theological Seminary, 2009

Mentor

A. D. Washington, D. Min.

This project focuses on the need for the congregation to participate in the rituals of death in the life of the church. The context for this project is a small town in Ohio that has been struggling with its identity and solidarity. The hypothesis was tested using a workshop, sermons, personal testimonials, and questionnaires. Through the course of the project the hypothesis was supported that while initially congregation members might have a distaste for the subject, once exposed to the benefits of communal practice, a majority were willing to participate in future funerary rituals.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As the 16<sup>th</sup> century English poet John Donne once remarked in his “Devotions upon Emergent Occasions”, “No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.” Certainly this has been the author's experience throughout this project. Nothing contained within is wholly and entirely from one person but rather represents a loving and supportive community of friends and associates who were joined together in this work. I lack the room to thank each individual who has contributed to this project. I would like to thank a number of uniquely special individuals who encouraged my work.

I begin with humble thanks to the Living God who sees me still as a new creation. Through this project, I became aware of not only my role, but also the role of my congregations in ministry. So, I give thanks to God for God's willingness to take me back to the potter's wheel, to remake me as the Divine will requires. May I always be open to those facets of ministry which I do poorly. I hope that in prayer and self-examination I might learn better how to feed the lambs of God while ultimately relying on the loving grace of my Lord and God.

In relation, I also give special thanks to Dr. A. D. Washington, whose ministry to me goes beyond measure. It was her challenge that forced this project out of me. It was

her support that helped me through the darkness. Without her presence in my life, I believe I would be a less proficient minister to God's people.

My heartfelt appreciation goes out to all of the students and staff of United Theological Seminary. Thank you for allowing me to better myself in God's service by accepting me at the seminary; especially Dr. F. Burrows and his special support.

My professional associates were of incredible assistance in the completion of this project. Many thanks go to Dr. Ron Allen and Dr. Felicity Kelcourse. A special note of thanks to the incredible reflections and support of Dr. Russel Haitch. Thank you for your encouragement and your challenges.

I thank Wilmington Friends Meeting who accepted me into ministry and patiently listen to what God places on my heart and mind. My appreciation goes to the congregation in general, and many souls in particular, who have walked this path with me. I include in this the Society of Friends both living and deceased, whose ministries have formed me thus far in my walk with the Lord. This includes a special thanks to Susan Henry who has helped me as my contextual associate. She has been a tireless advocate and supporter through this process.

I must give praise and thanks to my family. I give thanks to my parents and brother for their special ministries and most especially to my wife, Michelle. Michelle was my helper throughout this project as editor, sounding-board, and confidant. I am glad that I did not have to compensate her for her ministries for I could never afford to



adequately compensate her. Finally, my thanks to my child, who, Lord willing will be born to us shortly after this project enters into record. Thank you for encouraging me to see the promise of tomorrow.

## **DEDICATION**

This Doctor of Ministry project is dedicated to the many people who have felt alienated from God and the Church through the inattentiveness of those who serve the Church, both lay and clerical. May the presence of the Risen Lord bring you a measure of peace now and reconciliation tomorrow.

## INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Corinthians: “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately for many individuals and families, death still does have a sting. This is because, in part, rather than being surrounded by their culture and congregation as has been the case for centuries, the mourning face their time alone. In the increasingly post-modern America, traditional family and community is stressed and often broken. Faced with this new reality, Christ's church has a true ministry of caring by being that community that surrounds and supports those who are grieving. In doing so, the Church can strengthen not only its bonds within itself but also make new bonds to those on the outside. The problem is that the Church is also part of the culture and as such can suffer the same stresses that the broader culture suffers. Rather than being a supportive network of individuals under God's loving care, the local congregation of the Church is fractured and ineffective for mourners.

This project does not look at the work of professional clergy and their roles in mourning rituals per se, although certainly the clergy are involved as they are hopefully in all facets of congregational life. Plenty of resources have been produced that focus on funeral sermons, planning memorials, pastoral visitation, and grief counseling, all hopefully, to the betterment of Christ's church. Yet, where does this leave the laity? How

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor 15:55. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from Today's New International Version (TNIV).

does the congregation encourage and maintain this ministry along side of those administrations of the clergy? Therefore, the scope of this project focuses on the congregational involvement in the mourning rites. As a member of the clergy, the author envisions this project as a way that the clergy can encourage co-ministry with the laity. The purpose here is not to provide an ascribed ritual form to funerals, for each congregation within the body of Christ should decide on the rites which speak to their condition. Rather this project and writing pushes at the underlying need for those rites within the body of Christ to meet the needs of the mourning and the community (and the mourning community). For when both clergy and laity join together in care and support of the mourners, then “Death has been swallowed up in victory,”<sup>2</sup> so the congregation can truly ask where is Death's sting. Certainly though, it is not the congregation itself that illustrates this power, but rather the true power comes from our Triune God.

This Doctor of Ministry project attempts to critically analyze the importance of the congregation's participation in the funerary rites. This process will result from both study as well as context. Without a study of context, that is an understanding of pertinent history, ministry is likely to either recommit the sins of the past or blunder into lightly healed wounds. In order to be aware of the context of the congregation and the author, Chapter One will analyze the convergence of paths between the minister and the congregation. The minister's nature in this relationship will be discerned through a spiritual autobiography. The congregation's nature will be discerned through a demographic and historical study of the congregation and surrounding community.

---

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor 15:54b.

Chapter Two will provide the framework of how ritual helps the congregation to participate in the funerary rites of the church. The aim here is specific. It is not to provide an overview of funerary preaching, patterns of grief, or death universal. That is not to imply that any of these areas are not worthy of study. Truly each area has been and is being researched in a rich culture and literature. However, for this project, the focus must be constantly refocused onto the nature of the congregation and their relationship with the funerary rituals. Such lay participation, in the author's opinion, has received relatively little attention.

The nature of the funeral as a congregational event in Scripture, history, and theory is outlined in Chapter Three. Here one can begin to glean that the role of congregants (or the society) at funerals is not optional. Rather, in response to a deep set human need it is supported by historical, cultural, and Biblical accounts.

Chapter Four is a documentation of the author's research methodology. Again, the focus on the congregation is reaffirmed. By focusing on how funerals can be uncomfortable, the author illustrates how the awareness building is shared in multiple facets of congregational life.

A review of the author's experiences with this project is found in Chapter Five. Here is reflections on public talks, sermons, questionnaires, and a workshop. Also contained in this section is the responses by the author's congregation to this study. Some of these comments, either by word or participation, are brought forward for analysis to highlight attitudes within the congregation. This section also illustrates the positive growth in willingness to participate in funerary rituals, if the congregation is merely informed of their importance.

The final section in this work, Chapter Six, contains the author's reflections on his work through this process. Herein is also mentioned the connecting realm of research and work that the author wishes will receive new attention of study.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

Matthew has always found speaking with and listening to the Divine to come naturally even from a very young age. For reasons that are not clear, he did not speak until he was four years old, and then he spoke rarely until school forced more interaction. During these early years, his family lived in rural Nebraska and began attending a local Friends Meeting (Quaker Church). Matthew remembers the commute to worship being overly long, approximately an hour, but that it was worth it for the level of care and concern that he and his family received from the Friends at that Meeting. Being that there were no other children at the Meeting other than Matthew and his older brother, one of the weighty Friends<sup>1</sup> took it upon herself to have a Sunday School program for them. In retrospect, the boys were very blessed with this situation since the new teacher had been a college professor, and rather than forcing a set curriculum she taught as the children were able to learn.

The Meeting in Nebraska fostered Matthew's family's spiritual growth and maturation. All of them enjoyed that time greatly. Eventually, they asked Matthew's mother to become their next pastoral minister and arranged a house in town so that the family could more easily participate in local events. Over the next six years the family

---

<sup>1</sup>“Weighty” is a Quaker term to speak of a particularly rich and powerful soul. It can sometimes be synonymous with elder, Mother / Father, and similar titles in other denominations and faiths.

was closely tied to that Meeting, and Matthew began to experience some of what it meant to live in a pastoral family. He also began to become accustomed to the late night phone calls, school functions missed due to committee meetings, and odd discussions that were for adults only. These occurrences quickly acclimated Matthew to the life of a minister.

At this time, a friend of the family who worked with Child Protective Services asked Matthew's parents to help out with a couple of cases for foster care (the system was overrun at that time). For a while this was limited to babies and toddlers for a couple of nights until permanent homes could be found. However, it soon became the case that the family was asked to take on three more difficult cases.

The first of these cases was a foster care situation with a troubled girl (16 years-old), who was later diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic and histrionic. Somewhere she learned that the youngest person in a situation was who you took your frustrations out upon. In most of her life it had been her, but when she came to live with the Zuehlkes, Matthew was now the youngest. He thought at the time that she was mean, but it was just her coping mechanism. For the next year she would hide and or break Matthew's things, burn and cut him, and also physically assault him. Eventually her care became too much for Matthew's parents to cope with, and she was returned to the state. When Matthew asked where she was going (he was about eight) he was told that she was too sick to live with the family and that she had to go to live at a hospital. Even at that fairly young age, Matthew can remember thinking that prior to this mom and dad and the Meeting could do anything, but his own experiences with this girl taught Matthew that there are some cases that are beyond human control. He remembers sitting in open worship (i.e. silence) during Meeting thinking and praying for the girl's safe keeping and feeling a warming



presence come over him, telling him that, “There are people who you cannot fix, but that I have a place for.” He stood and shared out of the silence the best that he could what God had placed on his heart.

Matthew's parents were surprised by his message, to say the least. But the elders of the Meeting spoke with them and told them that God works through all ages and that they should try to encourage his speaking in ministry. A more complete concept of grace was taught to him to help with what he shared in worship. After some time, which was to calm his young heart he later learned, Matthew was asked to give a formal message (sermon) for worship. He agreed, not knowing quite what would happen.

Matthew preached his first sermon when he was eight. It was on conservation of God's creation and of natural resources. He spoke about being good stewards, although he used very different terms. Matthew remembers making the illustration of reading through his parent's encyclopedia and how many different creatures humankind had caused to go extinct. At that point, he made the observation that if humanity does not change its ways there might be some future volume in which some creature is reading about humanity's extinction. The Meeting laughed; a chuckle first but then a few more. He was serious, however the congregation took it as amusing. Matthew felt incredibly hurt by the experience. He left the Meetinghouse soon after. He remembers promising himself that he would never become a pastor if it meant opening himself up to that level of hurt. God certainly does have a way of turning us back upon ourselves.

The next foster child the family had was also a 16 year-old girl who came to them pregnant and a drug addict. Watching her going through withdrawal was certainly interesting and more than a little frightening for the young Matthew. Eventually though, the family all made it through the experience. After the birth of her baby, she gave up her

child to established parents. She then turned her focus to school and finished high school and college. During this process she also became Matthew's adopted sister. He remembers watching this unfold and often thinking that she was going to go away like the last girl, but still there was a redemptive quality working in her life. She could pull back from the edge and make something of herself. This has since informed his concept of redemption and what it mean to be an adopted child of God. Matthew learned that the Divine can take us in our human condition, whatever that is, and work with each person just as the potter can remake the clay.

The last of the foster / adopted children which would have a lasting impact was Matthew's to-be brother. This was the family's first boy older that 18 months. He was an intercity child of 12 years that was recently removed from his mother. It was hard for him to make the transition to the more rural life of a mid-Nebraska farming town. He had problems with stealing and with authority, but eventually he calmed down and entered into the family life. They were going through the adoption process when his birth-mother requested custody again due to financial reasons. As common in such cases, the state awarded custody back to his birth-mother. He eventually killed himself by a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Matthew was not informed about his pseudo-brother's suicide or funeral. This really hurt Matthew when he found out about the death later on. Without being included in the events or even made aware of the young man's death, Matthew felt cut off from the community and frustrated by his feelings. This frustration and confusion was to such a degree that when Matthew was first writing his story, he confused the story of Jack's suicide with another suicide / funeral he had witnessed early in his ministry (which will be shared later on). Somehow, when confronted with the reality of having to frankly

examine his own history the author created a false memory link. Perhaps this was due to the lack of closure on his part for not being in attendance or included in his brother's funeral. Matthew is not sure Jack even had a funeral.

The next eight years of Matthew's life were more typical. His family moved for his mother to attend seminary in Indiana at Earlham (later, one of the sites for Matthew's seminary education) and to fulfill different pastoral positions as the Spirit led his mother. During this time of his life, Matthew lost his first grandparent, his maternal grandmother. She had suffered from an advanced case of Alzheimer's Disease for a number of years which had the unfortunate effect of Matthew not having much of a relationship with her. When the time came for her funeral, only Matthew's mother attended services. From what Matthew heard from family members who attended, the funeral services were less than comforting or helpful in the time of grief.

Soon, Matthew's brother went to college and later Matthew followed suit. College was a time for growth, as is the case for many young persons. Matthew studied philosophy, German history, and art. The work in philosophy strengthened his critical eye and ability to argue a point of belief. Also, he began to see people's search for truth and belonging through multiple lenses, sometimes beneficial like that of art and sometimes harmful like that of Germany's Third Reich. Although Matthew was an active member of the Quaker Leader Scholars at Guilford College, his personal faith began to flag, caught up with the stress of completing a double major and concentration, as well as, not having much luck finding a new spiritual home. At the end of his second year, Matthew was offered a chance to study in Munich, Germany for six months with a group of students

under the care of his favorite professor. While his time of study abroad would be rife with personal problems and losses, it would become one of his strongest times of spiritual growth.

Matthew was in Germany for little more than a few weeks when he was struck down with stomach pains and hospitalized. He spent the next two weeks in a German hospital ward while his condition and subsequent treatment was ascertained. Through this time, Matthew read the only two English books he had, an older copy of Britain Yearly Meeting's *Quaker Faith & Practice* and a copy of the New International Version of the Scriptures.<sup>2</sup> As it turned out, his roommate was a physicist and a believer, who luckily was also fluent in English and had a patience with American youths. From those three resources, Matthew puzzled about the nature of reality, his place in the cosmos, and began thinking about God's continual care in his life. Eventually Matthew was released with a modified regiment that would keep everything in check until he could return home for surgery. At that time, he thought that life was turning around. Matthew began to attend Lutheran services with his hospital friend and found that he began to again enjoy his studies.

However, a month after Matthew had been released from the hospital, his professor and head of the program caught ill and died. As the senior student, Matthew was called in with some of the German professors to identify the body and begin preparations for its care. The students and supportive community had a local funeral in Germany for the students and professor's friends there from his numerous travels.

---

<sup>2</sup> As a personal aside, the NIV and now the inclusive language TNIV, remain Matthew's preferred translation for the Scriptures. There are certainly pastoral reasons for this choice, such as being a middle ground translation between left and right, as well as, its general readability. However, even now he wonders how much of this preference comes from this challenging time in his life during which he spent much time with this translation of the Scriptures.

Matthew, as a representative of the students, officiated the time with a local Lutheran pastor. Afterward, the body was returned to the United States for interment. Surprisingly, the study abroad program was not canceled by the college, and the students continued their studies and finished their term. However, Matthew found that the other students would come and talk to him about the teacher's passing. Eventually these conversations became more about the student's personal fears, faith, life after death, and similar issues. When the students were about to leave, they had a final party during which Matthew was honored as the group's "pastor". He bristled at the thought at first, remembering his earlier experience. Then he looked around and saw that the other students were calm and joyful, and that they were better off because they had worked together, and his heart was softened. Matthew remembered Christ speaking to Peter, telling him "take care of his sheep."<sup>3</sup>

Soon after returning stateside, Matthew began to think about his life after college. Trying to decide if he should pursue a life of ministry or a life of business, he split the difference. Matthew worked as an associate minister under a local Quaker minister and worked for a local photographic group. After a year, he found that business made him richer, but it was the ministry that he looked forward to and which allowed him to sleep at night, feeling that he had done his part. In deliberation with the senior minister and his family, Matthew agreed to become a minister himself. He started to candidate with Friends Meetings and was finally hired by a congregation in Illinois. So Matthew started his first congregation, separated from friends and family by 700 miles.

---

<sup>3</sup>"Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."" (John 21:16)

Matthew threw himself into the work, beginning to minister for the congregation in providing weekly worship, teaching Sunday School, and conducting choir. He found that he loved it. He had his first taste of officiating a marriage. He also performed his first funeral – remembering at the time to care for the family in their grief. Matthew also had his first two long standing counseling engagements, both marriages in trouble, for which he felt completely untrained to help with. One was able to resolve their differences; the other became a permanent separation. As an unmarried minister with a philosophy degree, Matthew found that marriage counseling was tricky. Clearly there were still some skills that Matthew needed to improve.

Matthew attended a funeral for a young man who had committed suicide in the small community near where he was serving. It is this memory mentioned earlier that he confused with the lack of memory with his foster brother's death. Like Jack previously, this was also a case of a self-inflicted gunshot. Matthew remembers going to this young man's funeral, officiated by someone the boy's family chose. Throughout the service the minister spoke about how people need to “confess our sins and come to Christ” before they die. In turn, Matthew felt himself becoming quite confused and angry. He wondered what this sermon track had to do for those who lost a loved one. It made him think about himself and his other (biological) brother who had lost their friend and soon-to-be brother in a similar manner a few years before. What does fear have to do with saying goodbye to a loved one? Once Matthew stilled his heart and listened for God, he heard that there was a place for him in God's care. Even if it was a suicide and even if he had made bad choices in his short life, God could work where human power failed. At that time Matthew turned his young man's care, as well as, that of his foster brother Jack, over to God, and he has been more-or-less at peace with it since. Although his self-inflicted

gunshot has probably done more to enforce Matthew's pacifistic leanings than any other single event. Unfortunately, time would have Matthew grapple with two deaths in rapid succession.

Shortly after this time, Matthew's maternal grandfather died. Faced with the financial situation of recently moving and establishing a house by himself, Matthew shared that it would be difficult for him to attend his grandfather's funeral two states away. Considering this, and the fact that no one in his immediate family besides his mother would attend the services, the family said that Matthew did not need to come. Therefore, the feeling was that it was not going to help, and it would be too expensive. Rather, he sat down and cried in the middle of the Meetinghouse, alone. He was removed from the funeral by two states to the west and removed from his immediate family two states to the southeast. This feeling of isolation was exacerbated by Matthew's special rapport with this grandfather. In fact, this grandfather was the one grandparent with whom Matthew had a relationship. His maternal grandmother was known as a formidable woman and highly intelligent. However, by the time that Matthew was speaking, she had already started to suffer from an advanced stage of Alzheimer's disease which rendered her largely a non-entity. Matthew's paternal grandfather was not a mean individual but was uncomfortable with children and therefore chose to remain distant to Matthew when he was growing up. Matthew's paternal grandmother was a loving but simple woman who did not know what to do with the inquisitive youth. This maternal grandfather, however, did know what to do with such a child and would often share with Matthew and his brother. He would encourage them to build and experiment. It is with him that Matthew felt most bonded of all the family, and it was his funeral that was seen as unnecessary for Matthew to attend.

It was during this time that the local Friends Meeting to which Matthew was ministering began to deal with the question of same-gendered relationships after another Friends Meeting in the same network chose to acknowledge a gay couple in Chicago. Even though Matthew is open to homosexuals and has many friends who are homosexual, his congregation was almost universally opposed to this action. He had to work with them in their condition rather than enforce his view point. Eventually, they worked through the combined feelings to a point that all could respond to them in a Christ-like rather than worldly manner. The congregation accepted the other Meeting and chose to acknowledge their choice even if they would have chosen differently. Although Matthew found this experience rewarding, he was also noticing that he was becoming tired easily and not bouncing back to full emotional strength each week.

With little support network and ever less formal training, Matthew didn't know what boundaries to draw. He would frequently work overly long hours and take poor care of himself. After a visit from his parents, it became clear that he needed more skills to do his job effectively. As such, he applied and was accepted to a seminary in Indianapolis that he commuted to weekly. The congregation was less than supportive of this, not wanting an 'overly educated pastor', saying that this counted as his day off for the week. Eventually, Matthew resigned his post in order to attend seminary full time. When he first came to that congregation, it averaged forty in worship; when he left 18 months later it was averaging sixty-five to seventy attenders a week.

While attending his first seminary, Matthew was offered a chance to transfer to Earlham School of Religion, a seminary in the Quaker tradition, and pastor a small Meeting nearby. Ready to return to ministry, he agreed. Matthew would find that his time at this Meeting was much better, emotionally and spiritually, than with the first



congregation. With a little more education under his belt, he also felt better equipped to deal with the requirements of the position. Soon after Matthew started attending this second seminary, his paternal grandfather also passed away. Again, Matthew did not attend the services. As stated earlier, the two were not close (in relationship or in distance) so a lack of attendance was not viewed adversely. However, in reflection, Matthew finds that he almost wishes that he was involved in some manner in the rituals for those deaths in his family so at least he would have a final form of comfort and closure.

After Matthew had been serving this congregation for about six months, one of the long attending members of the congregation died. When the deceased's family came to town to make arrangements, they asked Matthew if it was alright if a former minister, with which they had more of a relationship, performed the services. As a recently new hire and wanting the family to be at ease with the funeral, Matthew agreed. The other minister had been practicing for more years than Matthew had been alive, certainly if anyone would do the service well, it would be this individual. In retrospect, Matthew wishes he had not agreed to this other minister officiating. The deceased individual had been an active member in the community, sharing her gift of cooking wherever she went. She served the local school system as a cook and continued this gift for many years providing for the congregation's vacation Bible school children. With such a full life to use as source from which to speak, it would seem only natural that the officiating minister would choose a text such as, Jesus urging Peter to “feed my lambs”<sup>4</sup> or Christ's urging: “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat.”<sup>5</sup> Rather than choosing either

---

<sup>4</sup> Jn 21:15.

<sup>5</sup> Mt 25:35.

of these passages, or the number of others that speak about feeding the people of God, the minister chose to speak about baseball. Watching the family as well as congregation members in attendance, Matthew could easily discern that the funeral homily was not speaking to their respective conditions. It even stressed one family member out enough that the individual chose to leave the service halfway through. If this was not disappointing enough, when the congregation and family came to complain about the service, they spoke to the minister in residence (i.e. Matthew) rather than the one who officiated. Clearly this service was not an effective ceremony, either for winning souls to God or in comforting the grieving.

This experience gave Matthew a real world education on the results of a poorly orchestrated funeral service. First, he learned that the funerary rites are services not just for immediate family, but rather they are ceremonies for the entire community (either social or spiritual). Moreover, if the funerary services fail to meet its intended audience, then the officiating minister fails the intended goal.<sup>6</sup> This is especially true with the 'single-event services', such as weddings or funerals, where there can not be a next week or a redo. There is even another message that Matthew gleaned from this experience: that a minister serves a congregation while the minister is serving the congregation. After one leaves a congregation, one should not return to provide single services except in the most

---

<sup>6</sup> Certainly in any case where a minister is speaking, one always runs the risk of not speaking to the congregation's / community's condition. This is part of being human that personal failure is always a possibility. When this happens, professional ministers need to rely on the grace of God in order to speak to those gathered. Certainly in the author's personal experience, there have been a number of times he spoke that felt like failures from which God brought life and power. However, this should never encourage the minister to be nonchalant about the profession. A failed service or a misspoken message, even one God remakes into good, should always be viewed as a personal call to do better the next time. To rely entirely on the Grace of God to salvage poorly prepared or constructed messages is not being faithful, it is being sloppy.

unique examples and certainly not in cases of rituals.<sup>7</sup> This is because the ritual services, such as funerals, is for the life of the community and not for the accolades for minister giving them. As such, the minister who is servicing the needs of the community should be the one serving the community.

It is while serving this congregation that Matthew met and married his wife, a fellow seminarian from Earlham School of Religion. As more signs of life beyond his marriage, his local Meeting grew from a group of twenty to a group of fifty. The congregation, under his care, weathered through a problem with the youth volunteers living together without being married – a status many in the Meeting felt was a bad example for their children. When Matthew resigned, attendance was returning to forty-five, and the Friends had some on-going ministries to lead them into the future.

After graduating from seminary, Matthew and his wife relocated to their current home in Ohio where Matthew had the opportunity to serve a moderate sized congregation in Wilmington. His wife was hired as the chaplain for the local hospice. In his time at Wilmington, the congregation has already seen an increase in attendance, as well as, more community involvement in the life of the Meeting. In addition to his own worship, he is also performing vespers and services at the local retirement community, starting a new emerging worship group, and he has joined the community hospital as a volunteer chaplain.

Matthew's current message tends to center on sharing a strong family-based (a spiritual family) message of adoption – that even if modern people feel separated or alone, the congregation and God's loving Spirit can provide a home for all. He believes

---

<sup>7</sup> One instance where a minister might be allowed to return is to speak at a Homecoming celebration or similar occurrence. However, even in this case, a minister has to be careful to not over-stay their time.

we need not be connected by a blood bond in order to be a family, because here we are all adopted. Here we all come as we are. God takes us in our current condition whatever that may be. The great teacher Christ has something to share with us no matter how much we have been taught by the world, and the Spirit will care for us. The local parish congregation is a spiritual home for the spiritual homeless. The minister is not the center of attention but rather a facilitator in the family, helping others to find their personal ministries and strengthen their relationship with God. Matthew tends to work within the congregation and the local community to build stronger ties and support. The minister is also present to guide people through rites of passage, such a marriage and deaths, conveying the care of God even during these times of stress.

Matthew likes to find alternative solutions to problems facing the congregation and community. It has always been his belief that God is the originator of inspiration. So, when the Meeting's old tube organ failed in the Illinois Meeting and the congregation could not find the vacuum tubes, Matthew helped the Meeting find a digital replacement. When the youth group did not want to meet, Matthew started a "Young-at-Heart" group for retirees that was met with great success. When the hot water heating system had problems in Indiana, he pursued an alternative fluid and burners. Now in Ohio, Wilmington is beginning to look at solar collector to offset the Meeting's power consumption.

### **Wilmington Friends Meeting (WFM) and Surrounding Area**

Following is a report of research on the status of Wilmington Friends Meeting and its surrounding community. Wilmington Friends Meeting (Wilmington Friends from here out) is a small worshipping community in the south-western area of Ohio. The Meeting in many ways embodies being on the outskirts without being physically rural. The Meetinghouse is located in the downtown district of Wilmington. The Meetinghouse is behind the city building and within one block of the courthouse, the theater (non-movie), and a major community bank. The town of Wilmington is the county seat of Clinton County.

The community of Wilmington is a small town with a gradually reducing population of 22,628 persons residing in the Wilmington area,<sup>8</sup> while the town proper has 12,694 citizens.<sup>9</sup> The majority of Wilmington residents commute to the cities of Dayton, Cincinnati, or Columbus for shopping and other needs. The industry of Wilmington is a few smaller manufacturing plants and two major shipping groups: DHL and R&L Shipping (truck freight). As of May 2008, DHL, the largest employer in the area, announced that they will be ceasing operations in Wilmington. The shutdown is being enacted over phases, but the final total will be over 6,000 jobs. With the recent economic distress and the downturn in the housing market, Wilmington is struggling to keep not only its finances and population but also its hope.

---

<sup>8</sup>Percept Group, Inc., "First View 2008 for Zip Code 45177, Wilmington, OH," Percept Group, [www.perceptgroup.com](http://www.perceptgroup.com) (accessed December 13, 2007).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

In recent years, Wilmington Friends has been facing a continuing isolation from its own, broader religious community, as well as, its physical community. Wilmington Friends still has moderate ties with the local Quaker college. Even though Wilmington Friends is one of the larger congregations, it has seen a reduction in its participation in the larger affairs of Wilmington Yearly Meeting – the Meeting's broader organizational body. The Meeting sends few official representatives and rarely do members and / or attenders come if not required to do so by office. Earlier on in this century, Wilmington Friends was the cornerstone Meeting in the Yearly Meeting. There has also been a general distancing of Wilmington Friends from the general Yearly Meeting. As the congregation has continually become more liberal, both in politics as well as theology, the rest of the Yearly Meeting has become more conservative.

Another aspect that quickly becomes apparent is the relative short tenure of individual pastors. Over this section of time, the average stay of a pastor was only slightly more than three years. This high turnover of pastors brings into question the steadfastness of the leadership for the Meeting. It has been said that some of a pastor's best work happens after their fifth and six years, after he / she has been in place for most of a generation.<sup>10</sup> However, since the 1960s Wilmington Friends has only had four pastors that have remained for six years and two of those stayed for longer. One of the two longest-serving pastors, who served over twenty years ago, is likely the most-loved pastor. Whether the parallel with period of ministry and congregational contentment is simply a case of positive correlation is an open question. There certainly seems to be some relation.

---

<sup>10</sup> Phil Baisley, "Work of the Pastor," (Master of Divinity course work, Earlham School of Religion, Richmond, IN, March 2004).

The time-line also illustrates that Wilmington Friends appears to be well-invested in their Meetinghouse. The congregation rarely goes more than a few years between improvements to the facility. Most of the major projects have been to increase the usability (e.g. Sunday School wing), appearance (e.g. landscaping and renovations), and ministry aids (e.g. hymnals). One item of note is that if past cycles continue, such as a new furnace about every 40 years or retrofitting air conditioning to the location, then it is likely that Wilmington will have some new major projects in the next five years.

There has only been one congregation officially set-off (started by) Wilmington Friends Meeting. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was decided that a new Meeting would be formed in the eastern side of Wilmington to try to reach the poor and disenfranchised in that area. Ada Chapel was built soon after to answer that ministry. Ada Chapel was set as what is called within The Society of Friends as an Indulged Meeting. An Indulged Meeting is a Quaker method of expanding where a larger Meeting is responsible for establishing a newer, smaller Meeting. The host congregation normally would provide for the younger congregation in financial, business, and even spiritual need until it was self-sufficient. Traditionally, Indulged Meetings keep their status for perhaps a decade before becoming a full Monthly Meeting (congregation of their own). Unfortunately, Ada Chapel has never cut the apron strings of the larger congregation and has been an Indulged Meeting for over a hundred years. At this time Ada Chapel, which has perhaps a dozen attendees a week, still has indulged status. While the host meeting does not do much for the spiritual care of Ada Chapel, Wilmington Monthly Meeting is still responsible for the congregation at Ada Chapel in the matters of building, insurance, and Yearly Meeting activities. This problem is exacerbated by the nature of Ada Chapel's attendees. The group was never very effective at reaching its intended audience. The

congregation still does not pull in attendees from the surrounding neighborhoods. Rather, the majority of attendees are the disillusioned or angry former members of Wilmington Friends. The relationship is obfuscated one step further by the fact that Ada Chapel is being served by a former minister of Wilmington Friends who originally left in order to pursue other projects.

What this history does not thus far illustrate is that the congregation of Wilmington Friends has had a recent history of internal arguments that have caused the loss of members. There have been a number of arguments surrounding the use and upkeep of the building. In recent memory there have been: the Roof Issue,<sup>11</sup> the Paneling Issue,<sup>12</sup> and the Flag Issue<sup>13</sup>. It would seem on the surface that these are old issues in the life of the congregation, recent events have made it clear that this is not the case. Recently, the Peace and Social Concerns Committee, given the task to keep the congregation's moral compass on these issues, has ordered a Peace Pole for installation on the meetinghouse grounds. A Peace Pole is a simple staff of wood or similar material

---

<sup>11</sup>This argument surrounded the large expense of replacing the slate roof on the sanctuary for a total cost of over \$750,000 when the yearly budget was only \$150,000. Many felt that a less expensive roof would have been better with any additional monies being spent elsewhere. The slate was installed and some of the more vocal, liberal critics who wanted funds for ministry began to attend elsewhere.

<sup>12</sup>This argument centered on proposed changes to the sanctuary to remove wood paneling added in the 1950s in order to brighten the room and make it more inviting. Certain elders of the Meeting openly stated that if the paneling was taken down that they would leave the congregation and take their financial support with them. The Trustees of the Meeting felt that they could not afford to continue without the support of these members and so removed the motion from business. A number of families started to drift away soon after.

<sup>13</sup>This argument was over if the American and Christian Flags being removed from the sanctuary. The thought was that flags in the sanctuary were potentially idolatrous and encouraging a split allegiance to God and country. This is heightened when one is made aware that symbols, even of a religious nature, are rare in Quaker Meetinghouses as a response to the simplicity teaching. This time a number of the conservative families chose to leave.



that has the saying “May Peace Prevail on Earth” embossed on multiple sides in multiple languages.<sup>14</sup> For what would appear to be an otherwise moderate to liberal Quaker meeting with strong peace-church roots, this would appear to be a clear demonstrative testament to their stance. However, there has been much quiet dissent in this process, focusing mostly on the removal of the flags over fifteen years earlier. The feeling of the dissenters is that if there can be a symbol outside of the meetinghouse, then the flags should be allowed in the meetinghouse. This sentiment has even been stated by individuals who were less than ten years of age when the flags were an issue. Clearly in these cases, someone has been instructing the younger generation as to the party lines. As such, one can not assume that the historical disagreements are healed. In this case, the issues are alive and well in the memory of the people.

In addition to these, there have been four major problems with clergy in the past forty years. These will be described, not for gossip, but rather to show just how much the congregation is in need of healing. In one major case, a former pastor, who took over the Meeting's housing ministry (comprised of nine properties) was sued for allegedly propositioning his secretary sexually when caught responding in a personal manner to pornographic materials in the office. The case was settled out of court financially, and the former pastor is still lightly tied to the congregation through the housing ministry, as well as, Ada Chapel. Prior to this, the pastor was considered one of the most powerful ministers in this history of the Meeting. Now, the mention of the individual's name will illicit strong responses (from both sides of the issue) from many members of the

---

<sup>14</sup> The Peace Pole movement was started in Japan in 1955 by Masahisa Goi. Masahisa decided that sharing the idea “May Peace Prevail on Earth” engraved on poles around the world was his life's ministry. Today the ministry is continued by the World Peace Prayer Society (founded by Masahisa) as well as a number of smaller groups and builders. Numbers differ, but all appear to agree that at least 200,000 of the poles have been erected across the world.

congregation. Many of the congregation still wonder why he was not stripped of his recording (the Quaker equivalent to ordination), a recording Wilmington Friends sponsored him for.

In another case, a pastor was found to have tried to seduce and sexually assault female youths of the Meeting. When this behavior was discovered, he was replaced quietly. Even to this date, many in the congregation do not know this story. It should be noted though, at least one of the families of the girls who were assaulted are still in attendance. Although the author is led to believe that most of the other families left the congregation during this pastor's time or shortly after. One member who was willing to speak on the matter mused that the families might have left not only for the abuse their children received but also that the situation was not openly shared and did not receive subsequent support.

Awhile after these instances, a husband and wife team was hired to serve the congregation. This couple had such a challenging time ministering to the congregation at Wilmington that fighting became the established order. According to a few individuals, the husband walked out on Ministry and Counsel Committee, the go-between committee for laity-clergy relations for Friends. Shortly after, the two left Wilmington Friends. The couple's abrupt leaving put additional strain on relationships within the congregation, encouraging individuals to take sides on the matter. This strengthened some of the party lines that already existed within the congregation and even created some new ones.

In an attempt to fix the situation, the congregation began a long search process for the hiring of the congregation's future pastor. At the end of the process, it appears that an ideal candidate was found. However, just as a candidate was chosen by the search committee, the acting youth minister complained that she should have been not only in

the running for the position but also should have been the primary candidate. Cautious of another fight, for the youth minister was popular among some of the younger families, it was decided to cut loose all the candidates and hire the youth minister as senior pastor. The individual lasted a short time but was so poor in the new position that the congregation's attendance suffered a marked drop. After this point, it was decided to hire a transitional specialist from the Presbyterian church who served for two years. The current pastor was hired after this individual and is now in his fourth year of ministry with Wilmington Friends.

### Demographic Study

Demographics have, at times, become a dirty word. There is concern, and rightly so, that breaking a community down into numbers can fail to see all the nuances present. Even so demographics, or statistical characteristics (and study thereof) of human populations, can be of great value to help Wilmington Friends as they try to understand what is happening in its surrounding community. Once the local community is understood, it will be easier for the congregation to identify potential ministry fields. In business, demographic studies are used especially to identify markets. Here the Meeting's market is to identify people who could be brought into relationship with Wilmington Friends.

One of the primary concerns for any congregation is to whom they should focus their outreach efforts. Outreach programs tend to work best when they are oriented to a certain group (or groups) of individuals – what a youth is looking for is not always what a retiree is looking for in a congregation. Wilmington, like most population centers, is

about evenly split between male<sup>15</sup> and female<sup>16</sup>, with a slightly higher percentage of females. With that in mind, a quick glance at the population chart illustrates that those who are young adults or middle-aged (25 – 59 yrs) comprise the bulk of Wilmington's population. Less than a quarter of the population is over 60. Certainly Wilmington is not a old community by any stretch of imagination. Rather an outreach to youth, young adults, and middle-agers appears, as far as population is concerned, to be the best demographics Wilmington Friends can reach out to. In other manners, the city of Wilmington is nearly uniform. For example, when polled, only a combined 9.7%<sup>17</sup> of the population listed their racial background as something other than Caucasian. In a similar vein, only 0.9%<sup>18</sup> of those polled list anything other than English as their native language.

So what can be learned about the Wilmington community? The majority of households are families (more than one person living together, related by biological ties or marriage) (79.8%)<sup>19</sup> with only a relative minority (20.2%)<sup>20</sup> living alone. A little under half (41.4%)<sup>21</sup> of all households have individuals under 18 years. Single mothers comprise a small minority, only about 19 individuals.<sup>22</sup> The average family size is just

---

<sup>15</sup> Male population: 47.5%, Female population: 52.5%. The small difference between these two is negligible for ministry concerns.

<sup>16</sup> Population Finder, “Zip Code Tabulation Area 45177,” U.S. Census Bureau, [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFPopulation\\_event=Search&name=45177&\\_state=&\\_county=&\\_cityTown=&\\_zip=45177&\\_sse=on&\\_lang=en&pctxt=fph](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFPopulation_event=Search&name=45177&_state=&_county=&_cityTown=&_zip=45177&_sse=on&_lang=en&pctxt=fph) (accessed August 24, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Census data terms 'single mothers' as “female householder, no husband present with own children under 18 yrs.”

slightly over three individuals. What this could mean for Wilmington Friends is that programs geared to families will have the greatest population base. Although from this information, there are two possible niche ministries in singles, about 20 people, and single mothers. Since the singles category includes individuals from all age brackets, it is less likely that this will be a unified group – although it is possible. The other niche, single mothers, is quite likely to be in close age brackets and could be a fruitful field. However, this is questionable itself with the numbers involved, considering this is only about 40 people.

The people of the Wilmington community tend to be blue collar workers.<sup>23</sup> Only a relative minority work in the management and professional workplace. Rather, production, materials handling, and transportation are the most popular occupations with sales and office staff coming in second. The census data also shows that the mean travel time to work (one way) is about 23 minutes. As of the last census data Wilmington is below the national average for income. Seventeen point four percent of the population are at or below poverty status (8.6% of families and 13.9% of individuals). In a year's time, the average individual from Wilmington earns just over \$23,000. Of those with a mortgage, 52.4% pay between \$600 - \$1100. Almost half of the population of Wilmington are renters. Moreover, the majority adults in Wilmington (89%) do not have a college degree.<sup>24</sup> Since many ministers tend to have at least a college degree and will have their living situation provided, whoever serves the Wilmington area as a

---

<sup>23</sup> The colloquialism of 'white collar' is for one who is in a semi-professional to professional role, requiring education and often salaried. Some examples of white collar workers would be office worker, physician, and clergy. 'Blue collar' on the other other hand, describes working citizens whose occupation requires some amount of manual labor. Workers on these jobs are commonly paid hourly. Examples of blue collar occupations are machine press operator, miner, mechanic, and janitor.

<sup>24</sup>Population Finder, "Zip Code Tabulation Area 45177."

professional minister will likely have to stretch outside of his / her element. As such this community is likely to have different theological concerns than one that has a majority of white collar individuals.

Wilmington Friends, from the author's interviews and research does not tend to reflect the community in which it is located. While the attendees at worship tend to be Caucasian families with the majority between 20 and 75 years of age, in norm for the surrounding area, in income, home ownership, and education the two differ widely. The vast majority of the congregation both own their own home ( 90%)<sup>25</sup> as well as have a college degree (85%)<sup>26</sup>. Additionally at this time, 35% of attenders have advanced degrees.<sup>27</sup> This is in comparison to only 9% of the local community that has a similar level of education.<sup>28</sup> This could perhaps offer a challenge for the Meeting if they were to welcome more of the community into the congregation, because it would seem statically less likely that the next fifty attendees to worship are going to have this level of education. When the current senior pastor was called to serve the congregation, he remembers it being shared multiple times that the congregation wanted intellectual and challenging sermons. This is not to give the idea that those who have not attended college or other institutions can not fathom these sermons. This rather show where the congregation itself sees its priorities and preferences. If there is a feeling that the

---

<sup>25</sup>Members of Wilmington Friends Meeting, Interview by Matthew Zuehlke, Wilmington, OH, 2007.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Population Finder, "Zip Code Tabulation Area 45177."

congregation needs to sound educated, such as in sermons, then it would seem reasonable that the congregation might be challenged to welcome uneducated / undereducated individuals.

Another way in which the congregation and community are different is whereas the town is close to a perfect split, Wilmington Friends has a strong majority of female attendees. At first there was a thought that it would be highly doubtful that this statistic would have any ministerial impact, but on greater reflection it might. Wilmington Friends does not have any male-based ministry at this time. Looking at the majority of groups within the congregation (i.e. choir, bell choir, Senior Adult Fellowship, Pastor's breakfast meeting, etc.) they are attended by an overwhelmingly female audience. There is also a gender discrepancy in the named committees of the congregation.<sup>29</sup> The Meeting also does have a chapter of the United Society of Friends Women (USFW), a form of Church ladies group but does not have a chapter of the corresponding "Quaker Men" group. This nature of the congregation would appear to be out of unity with the Friend's traditional understanding of Equality in God. Moreover, and of a practical concern, one has to wonder if a hypothetical new attendee with a musical calling would be encouraged to join a twelve person bell choir with only two other males in attendance. Perhaps gender inclusivity, or even gender evangelism, is a problem for Wilmington Friends. This is of particular concern when one notes that the most recent generation of youth (12-16 years old) in the Meeting are majorly male. Faced with the nature of the adult worship and faith community, one has to ask: "Is there anything being offered for them as adults that they would desire to be a part?"

---

<sup>29</sup> For example, Fellowship & Activities, is overwhelmingly female as is Christian Education and Peace & Social Concerns. Trustees and Stewardship & Finance committees are staffed by a majority of males. The last two clerks of the Meeting, the top lay individual of the congregation, have both been women. As a bright point, Ministry & Counsel is fairly balanced between genders.

Wilmington Friends has a challenge before it in its relationship with the broader Wilmington community. In many ways the two groups are at odds with each other in manners and means. Certainly this is not the only congregation that is faced with the problem of not being representative of the community. So many congregations have suffered this in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by what is sometimes referred to the “white flight” - when the Caucasian residents and attendees of urban congregations began to move to the suburbs, choosing instead to only commute to their place of worship on the weekend. While not that bad, Wilmington Friends still has a struggle before it. Confronted with this reality, it is hoped that the congregation will begin to analyze in what ministries they might be able to meet the needs and nature of the community – what it is that they might do in order to create the bond of friendship and support through which others might be cared for and brought into the family of God. As the situation stands currently, if something does not shift, it is likely that the congregation will continue to alienate its community.

### **The Meeting of Stories (Synergy)**

The synergy reflects the meeting of two roads, two paths – the congregational context and the pastor. It is hoped that by the union of the two greater health and healing might arise. While the project is reliant upon this union, the author fully believes that the themes addressed within the study are universal enough that any results from this research can be replicated in any context of ministry. While this is believed, the author also understands that this project, and any subsequent data, will arise from the common wounds between pastor and context, as well as, the individual's drive to heal. It is the



need of the passion to find a solution to the problem of dysfunctional funerals that will allow the work to see forward progress. It is hoped that this project is one brick in the road towards a healed Church Universal.

When looking over his life, Matthew Zuehlke began to see that in his life he has a number of unhealed wounds surrounding the loss of friends and loved ones. Even to this date, times of heightened memory, such as New Year's celebrations, are challenging for him. He does not remember having any conversations as a child with his elders about the nature of death and grief. He does not remember ever really being brought in to the funeral process. When, as a child, a member of the Meeting died, he was encouraged to play outside rather than being brought in to the community of the Meeting for the service. The combined deaths of suicide that reminded him of his foster brother and the death of his grandfather painted a long shadow on Matthew's first year of pastoral ministry. Both of these events still have a profound effect on him. When thinking of his foster brother and the suicide victim, Matthew still feels a tightness within his being and an urge to cry. In a similar manner, even nine years later, his grandfather's hat is on his wall in his office, and Matthew earnestly wishes his grandfather could have seen him become a pastor and an educated man, as well as, meet Matthew's wife.

Certainly the researcher is not alone in the general experience of his life. Surely many individuals have had more dramatic experiences of loss and alienation. However, mentioning these experiences demonstrates that recalled emotions and questions are likely to be shared by most individuals. Why are children not welcome in adult memorials and funerals? Why are our funerals not geared, at least in part, to the young? Why should one not participate in funeral practices if it is not reasonable for financial, temporal, etc reasons? How do we put a communal arm around the hurting so that the

grieving do not feel alone? It is important to remember to be honest in dealing with children at times of funerals. Or, as the scholar Wiersbe writes, “Children must never be told something about a death that must be 'untold' later on.”<sup>30</sup> What has been so interesting is to realize that the local context had many of the same experiences, though not all about the death of a loved one.

Wilmington Friends Meeting, as well as, the City of Wilmington proper, has failed in their communal grief process. The congregation has come through a time of troubles, unrest, and pain. It is not merely the painful events that illustrate that Wilmington Friends failed, for pain does happen. Rather it is the subsequent splitting and loss of members that demonstrates that communal identity was not maintained through the pain. As such, the process for how the community interacts with loss and the subsequent pain needs to be examined.

---

<sup>30</sup> Warren Wiersbe and David Wiersbe, *Ministering to the Mourning: A Practical Guide for Pastors, Church Leaders, and Other Caregivers* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2006), 102.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE ROAD TO HEALING

This project hopes to establish a clear atmosphere around the processes and events of death. The purpose of this is so when individuals do die, the community and clergy will be prepared. The faith community must be ready to experience the ritual as a whole, and the clergy should be ready to take the helm in a sensitive manner. “To dust off an old outline simply won't do,” urges Wiersbe, but a “loving shepherd who knows his sheep will have the right words to say.”<sup>1</sup> If the congregation is ready, then those from outside the community will have a functional net into which to fall. This will come by returning to the Church's use of the ritual of burial and funeral rites. As Driver notes in his work *Liberating Rites*, “Human longing for ritual is deep, and in our culture often frustrated.”<sup>2</sup> The process will come about through the “church within the church” model where as a smaller group within the whole will be engaged on the topic. This group will work through the topic in a more in-depth manner. The group will include those who either have some past pains to grapple with or are willing to look at the death practice of our culture, and potentially both. Through this process, it is hoped that the congregation might be able to build a healthy spiritual family, based in part on what it requires to be a

---

<sup>1</sup> Warren Wiersbe and David Wiersbe, *Ministering to the Mourning*, 116.

<sup>2</sup> Tom F. Driver, *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 3.

healthy family of origin. To be a loving spiritual family would require adaptability to meet the member's needs, commitment to the group, communication, encouragement, appreciation, spiritual orientation, social connectedness, clear roles, and shared time.<sup>3</sup> Each of these aspects are exactly what is present in a congregation that cares for its members in times of loss.

This project and corresponding messages have had the particular focus on the care of the laity. A program of lay pastoral care giving implements a “community approach to the care of souls within a congregation.”<sup>4</sup> Lay care giving is an re-emerging practice in the Christian church. This model of care has been utilized historically when pastoral demand taxed clergy supply, such as the cases of the community churches of Paul or the circuit riding preachers of early American colonies. Unfortunately our modern culture is starting to see a loss of clergy availability. Today, clergy are split in one of two ways. First, as senior pastors, the clergy person focuses on a variety goals and programs in order to keep the congregation's ministries function. In these cases, the resident clergy is often called upon to take on more of the flavor of a CEO than a chaplain. The second model common for today's clergy is the bi-vocational call where the pastor either chooses or is forced to (as a matter of finance) have another, secular occupation. When this happens, the pastor's attention is split between the variety of roles she / he fulfills. Certainly there are single calling pastors who are adequate to exemplary in pastoral care (or bi-vocational pastors who balance their roles), nor is this a statement that modern clergy are incapable of providing such care. What this is speaking to is the breadth and wholeness that can be

---

<sup>3</sup> N. Duncan Sinclair, *Horrid Traumat: A Pastoral Response to the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (New York, NY: Haworth Pastoral Press, 1993), 94-96.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy M. Farabaugh, *Lay Pastoral Care Giving* (Nashville, TN: Disciples Resources, 2009), 14.

found in implementing a way for “clergy and laity can work together in new and creative ways to care for souls. This is the team-based approach to pastoral care that we need.”<sup>5</sup> Certainly a team, a community, is needed to provide the warmth and nurture to those who are grieving.

Part of this process of education for the congregation will include reflections upon who is important in a funeral. For example, recent research shows that children should be included in the rituals and practices rather than excluded. This is due to the now understood condition that excluding children from the community, especially at a time of loss, only encourages psychological and spiritual damage.<sup>6</sup> Also in question is how the faith community responds to victims of suicide, gang members, and other emotional pitfalls. Rather than casting these unfortunate cases aside, the ritual for the funeral can give the lost a place within the community and a chance to provide emotional bonding.<sup>7</sup> The ultimate result of this process is the formation of a group within the congregation who will help start to mend and stretch the net that the community uses to catch those who are hurting through a loss.

---

<sup>5</sup> Timothy M. Farabaugh, *Lay Pastoral Care Giving*, 15.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying: What the dying have to teach doctors, nurses, clergy, and their own families* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1997), 20-21.

<sup>7</sup> Driver, *Liberating Rites*, 152.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUNERAL

Death is still the primary question for humanity. It is the one question that is the “most universal human experience.”<sup>1</sup> Death truly is a question, or problem, without a solution. It is the one place where others go that the individual can not follow, at least until it is that individual's time. Moreover, once there, a person can not return from the experience of the grave to relate its condition to others. It simply can not be known. Even the rash of recent, modern “near death experiences” point to the exclusive nature of death. These events, whatever they may be, are called near-death, not post-death experiences. The afterlife is still hidden from our view. In her scathingly critical work *“Putting Away Childish Things”*, Uta Ranke-Heinemann looks at the nature of death

It is not easy to understand what dying means, and the significance of death itself has yet to be discovered. Hence it comes as no surprise that death doesn't mean the same thing to everyone. . . . In the face of death, all claims to superior knowledge are signs of total ignorance.<sup>2</sup>

Ranke-Heinemann's larger body of work wrestles with a theology that departs from that of mainline and traditional Christianity, with its views of the life and divinity of Jesus (and other points of doctrine). These thoughts the author can not agree with. However, in

---

<sup>1</sup>Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998), 527.

<sup>2</sup>Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Putting Away Childish Things*, translated by Peter Heinegg (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 133.

this thought on the nature of death, Ranke-Heinemann has struck to the core of the matter of death: it is beyond human knowledge. As such, death and how the congregation wrestles with it, is at least one clear arena which faith only can rule. The congregation is needed in this modern world to help provide a safe group to mourn and let faith take hold.

As the author looks at his context, it becomes clear that Wilmington is in need of mourning a loss. When he arrived in the city of Wilmington three years ago, the community was celebrating the announcement that DHL, a branch of Deutsch Post Shipping, would make the Wilmington Airpark (a former air base) its western headquarters. This announcement came with thousands of jobs, a large tax-based increase for city coffers, and a by-pass to the local Interstate built by the state of Ohio. Then in November of 2008 it was announced that DHL has misjudged the market and was going to pull out of the American market and thus Wilmington, Ohio. In the months prior to this time, the community held an unemployment rate at approximately 5.2%. Some early figures of 2009 put the unemployment rate at 14.3%, and it is quite likely higher.<sup>3</sup> This figure is a full 6% higher than anything the area has seen in 20 years. There was an additional concern that work on the partially completed by-pass would cease. This has proven by this time to be untrue. However, there are concerns that it will have little purpose now without DHL requiring its construction. Other companies, such a branch of Technicolor, have announced their closing due to the lack of availability of nearby shipping. This, combined with the economic slowdown of 2008-2009, has changed the

---

<sup>3</sup> Economagic.com, "Economic Time Series Page," <http://www.economagic.com/em-cgi/data.exe/blsla/lauMC39489403> ([accessed February 1, 2009](#)).

attitude around town from hopeful optimism to downtrodden fear. In a recent “60 Minutes” news segment where Wilmington was the focus, a viewer could hear just how the citizens have become depressed and frightened.<sup>4</sup>

In this experience, the Wilmington community has experienced a kind of death – a death of lost hope and lost identity. The citizens of this town are in need of mourning so that the community can heal. A mourning with form that can give them a framework, that is a ritual of sorts, from which to base their experiences and emotions would be best. Wilmington is certainly in need of healing if the town wishes to remain (or regain) its identity as a community. It could be helpful to share with the community the understanding that, as George Fox the early Quaker stated:

And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, Oh then, I heard a voice which said, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition," and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord did let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give him all the glory; for all are concluded under sin, and shut up in unbelief as I had been, that Jesus Christ might have pre-eminence, who enlightens, and gives grace, faith, and power.<sup>5</sup>

Certainly what the Christian, independent of denomination, calls upon in their hour of need is the presence of the Holy Spirit and the Living Christ whose grace gives peace that passes all understanding.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>CBS News, “Economic Storm Batters Ohio Town,” <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/01/22/60minutes/main4747832.shtml> (accessed Jan 30, 2009).

<sup>5</sup>Emilie Griffin and Douglas Steere, *Quaker Spirituality: Selected Writings* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2005), 11-12.

<sup>6</sup> Phil 4:7.



Healing is important in the occurrence of any wound to the body. This is true whether that body is of an individual organism or if it is an unified body (e.g. congregation or family). It also would appear reasonable that, mirroring the actions<sup>7</sup> and living up to the commands<sup>8</sup> of the Church's teacher and lord, that healing, in some manner, is within the realm of the Church. It is the author's belief that the process of healing for an unified body of a congregation can best happen as the community starts to experience additional moments of pain and grief now and into the future. At first glance, this might seem almost harsh. However, this is not a harsh treatment, but rather having the body of Christ preparing for an eventual ministry opportunity. This ministry relies on the nature that as people experience additional, smaller wounds after a catastrophic hurt that did not heal; and if those smaller wounds heal in a proper manner, then those individual might be knit back together piece by piece into a healthier whole. Certainly, as is the case in many ways, what is applicable on the individual level can also be applicable on the community level, just on a larger scale. To think of the process another way, contemplate a bone fracture that heals incorrectly. By this happening, the individual's mobility and / or general health is impaired. In order to fix this situation, a physician must, in effect, re-break the limb. Afterward, the limb may be reset so that it can heal this time in a proper manner. With this understanding, in the case of a community such as Wilmington which has experienced a catastrophic wound, it would appear to be more humane to wait for those wounds that the community would normally experience (e.g.

---

<sup>7</sup> Christ's healings in the Gospels are numerous: Mt 4:2, (Mt 8:3, Lk 17:12-14), Mt 8:13, Mt 8:14-15, Mt 9:6-7, Mt 9:20-22, Lk 8:51-55, (Mt 9:29-30, 20:34, Mk 8:23-25, 10:51-52, Jn 9:7), Mt 12:13, Mt 17:15-18, Mk 7:32-35, Lk 7:14-15, Lk 13:11-13, Lk 14:2-4, Lk 22:50-51, Jn 4:52-53, Jn 5:8-9, Jn 11:43-44. In addition there are other texts where the Gospel cites healing (e.g. crowds) without specifics.

<sup>8</sup> Christ sent out the disciples, giving them authority "to heal every disease and sickness." Mt 10:1. Similar passage in Lk 9:1.

the common deaths occurring within the community). After each occurrence of loss, the local congregation(s) might give aid to help minister to the healing through ritualistic mourning (i.e. funerals). This would seem to be preferred and certainly more feasible rather purposely re-breaking the original wound that the community experienced. These losses are a normal part of life and will happen independent of the Church's involvement. Otherwise, such as in the case of Wilmington, in order to perform a similar re-breaking would require a similar event to the previous, catastrophic wound (in Wilmington's example, a further loss of an additional 10,000 jobs).<sup>9</sup> This would seem impractical and quite dangerous. In looking at this idea in another way, Dr. Washington once stated:

The process of reconstruction is one of preparing the hearts and minds of the people of the church, as well as, the community to adopt and accept a new creation that will emerge from collaborative participation and investment in a community that will be valued by residents and those transient persons who work in the area.<sup>10</sup>

The burial and other Christian funerary rites for the deaths within the community are just such occasions to prepare the hearts and minds for adopting a new creation – a new reality. Hopefully out of this new reality, a healthy community life can be forged.

---

<sup>9</sup> The unfeasible nature of causing a second traumatic experience to allow proper healing is dangerous to rely on as the only deterrent. While given current technology, the idea of being able to create a second disaster, such as Hurricane Katrina, appears to be wholly in the realm of fiction, each day scientists and inventors are expanding humanity's abilities. As such, the Church must adopt a theology of care that can not be made obsolete only by technological or political change. Rather, the theological thought must rest on the moral considerations of the ministry. It is a firmer stance to say that it is wrong to create a second disaster rather than wait for the disasters in miniature that each person and community experience.

<sup>10</sup>A. D. Washington, "The New Jerusalem: A Biblical Model of Deconstruction and Reconstruction to Create the 'Ideal Church'" (D.Min. project, United Theological Seminary, 2007), 14.

### Historical Foundations

Death and the funeral have changed in recent decades. In previous centuries, death was a constant presence. Every family would have personal experiences of loss.

According to some researchers even up to the late Middle Ages the infant mortality rate in Europe, supposedly a 'civilized' people, rested between 35-40%.<sup>11</sup> This means that each married couple would experience many losses in their normal lives. In comparison, the modern American's experience is quite different. This figure is only dealing with those lost in infancy, if one considers the additional losses in childbirth, illness, and household / occupation accidents, the personal experiences of death would have been much more frequent than in our modern day. It has become the rarity to lose a child, or in fact anyone, due to medical advances. In her seminal research on the subject of death, Dr. Kubler-Ross observes that:

Epidemics have taken a great toll of lives in past generations. Death in infancy and early childhood was frequent and there were few families who didn't lose a member of the family at an early age. Medicine has change greatly in the last decades. Widespread vaccinations have practically eradicated many illnesses, at least in western Europe and the United States. The use of chemotherapy, especially the antibiotics, has contributed to an ever decreasing number of fatalities in infection diseases. Better child care and education has effected a low morbidity and mortality among children. The many diseases that have taken an impressive toll among the young and middle-aged have been conquered. The number of old people is on the rise.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup>Margaret Schaus, *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia* (New York: NY: Routledge, 2006), 199.

<sup>12</sup>Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, 15-16.

Largely due to medical advancements, modern Americans just do not have the connection to death and the related mourning process that those who have come before us have had. As compared to past cultures, modern society offers fewer chances for funerals.<sup>13</sup> However, having to deal with the reality of death less frequently would seem to be a poor excuse for entering into the mourning processes in a way that deters healing for the benefit of individuals and communities.

The early church viewed burial of their dead as a blessed thing. Although, by the nature of the emerging church being on the outside of the community and under persecution, there were times where they could not care for their dead. In a Letter from Lyons to Phrygia, 177 CE, it is shared how some of the members of the early church who were lost as martyrs were denied their burial by the church. Rather than being cared for by the community, the bodies of the deceased were mutilated and ridiculed and finally disposed by the authorities. The author views this behavior as coming from “lawless men”<sup>14</sup> Here the lack of decent burial by the church is seen as unfortunate but not necessary for care. According to the writer of the letter, the community did this to see if they could defeat the new movement. This brings an interesting facet of the funeral ritual within the Church; namely that proper burial is not necessary for resurrection or an afterlife. This helps in knowing that the purpose of the burial is for life with the church and not for self (spiritual) status. This is quite different from many other spiritual traditions, such as the Norse, that require proper 'burial rites' (i.e falling in battle) in order to enter their afterlife (i.e. Valhalla).<sup>15</sup> Although, it is important to note that there are

---

<sup>13</sup>Driver, *Liberating Rites*, 153.

<sup>14</sup> Eberhard Arnold, ed., *The Early Christians: In Their Own Words*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Farmington, PA: Plough Publishing House, 1997), 83.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Kerrigan, *The History of Death* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2007), 24.

associated rites (e.g. baptism, communion, etc) that some Christians have believed (and many still do believe) are necessary before one can enter Heaven. Funerals, traditionally, are not among them.

While burial in the early Church is not viewed as a necessity, it is still seen as important and an act of charity. In 137 CE, Aristides wrote an apology of the Christian community in which he tried to downplay fears of the emerging faith. In the letter's listing of acts of kindness practiced by the Christian, he writes, "If one of them sees that one of their poor must leave this world, he provides for his burial as well as he can."<sup>16</sup> In this, one can hear that the providing for the funerary rites is seen as a duty willingly undertaken by the early Church. Later on in the same piece, the writer notes that in the event of a death, the community joins together in both (either) celebration of life and / or mourning of passing.

Faced with the early struggles and persecutions of the Church, it is reasonable that the community would bind itself together in its rituals. To practice such mercies as funerals and burials likely brought the besot spiritual family together for self reliance and support. This early stance of funerary ritual as a sign of a faithful Christian speaks strongly to the modern Christian community. Many Christians have spoken in recent years of the want to return to the primitive or early Church. If this is the case, certainly the church should then begin to take its place in this ministry of funerary rites just a seriously.

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 110. The masculine pronouns used in this passage say more for the writing style of the day than for any commentary on gender inclusiveness in burial rites. Earlier in this same work, Aristides speaks specifically of women and their qualities within the emerging Christian movement. He even goes as far as to say that both genders of slaves or dependents are welcomed in love to the Christian community.

Unfortunately, knowledge of the funerary practices of the early church is scant at this time. Up through the first three centuries of the Christian community, there is scant surviving writings on funerary rites.<sup>17</sup> The earliest complete, written, single-purpose burial prayer, for instance, dates to 350 C.E. from the Bishop Seapion of Thmuis.<sup>18</sup> To date, very few descriptions of the funeral rituals from this time have been discovered. As such, the modern scholar will find it difficult to find out what might have been said, sung, or performed when the emerging Church experienced a death within the community in these early years.

An interesting side note from this early time in Christian history is that it appears a strong attempt was made by the Church to keep burials affordable for the community.<sup>19</sup> In this behavior we can see two interesting, modern implications. First that the Church tried to make burial (and by connection, the associated rites) as available to the community as possible. As it would be bizarre to provide assistance in an area that was not believed to be of value (e.g. buying food vs. buying a ticket to entertainment), we can see the values that the early Church held. In providing such aid, it can be reasonably extrapolated that the early Church saw such practices as somehow important to the family, the community, or both. Secondly, the Church saw the importance of burial as something where the Church should be involved, even to its own cost.

---

<sup>17</sup>James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 295.

<sup>18</sup>Melinda A. Quivik, *A Christian Funeral: Witness to the Resurrection* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 31.

<sup>19</sup> White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 295.

What we do know, we glean from a few sources that hint at a series of funeral activities. It appears that the body was ritually washed where it was resting, the Christian community processed with the body to the place of interment. During the procession, the gathered congregation would offer prayers, psalms, and songs.<sup>20</sup> In the early years of the Christian movement, it was believed that death was viewed as a “heavenly birthday.” - that is the individual's entrance into Heaven and God's presence.<sup>21</sup> To this end, the works of deceased noteworthy Christians of this time (what many refer to as 'saints'), were celebrated on the dates of the death and / or funerals rather than on the days when they were born into the earthly realm. Later on, it appears that this form evolved to include a worship of funeral service. Sometimes, this service was held at the place of worship after the burial; in other locations / times this service was a pre-burial vigil. This variety within the early Church should not be seen as a concern of unified order within the Church, but rather the richness, even in the first years, to which that the Church can speak. It is not until the fourth or fifth centuries that scholars can find complete funeral rituals in the surviving documents of the early Church. It appears that the system was largely codified within the European-Roman Church by the ninth century C.E.<sup>22</sup> Even at the beginning of the Christian movement, there was a variety of practice among the people of God.

In the Medieval Ages, the Church in Europe began to codify its beliefs and practices for funerals. At this time, as the historian James White wrote, “The office of the dead developed out of psalms originally sung at funerals.”<sup>23</sup> As with most Church

---

<sup>20</sup> Quivik, *A Christian Funeral*, 30.

<sup>21</sup> White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 296.

<sup>22</sup> Quivik, *A Christian Funeral*, 31.

<sup>23</sup> White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 297.

functions, the medieval church continued the work towards a unified form. Also, over the next few centuries, the funeral rites began to take on a new spiritual meaning. No longer was the burial viewed as a holy birth into a full life with God, but rather it began to be concerned with the possible damnation of the soul. White continues, “the burial rites came to be permeated with awe and fear over the destination of the soul.”<sup>24</sup> No longer focusing on the joyful aspects of a Christian life well lived, the mood of the day turned to concern for the mistakes the individual might have committed that would push the soul in damnation. This is quite a marked change of belief and teaching as compared to the concept of a “heavenly birthday” of the earlier times. Faced with the very real concerns of having a loved one or important member of the community die, individuals were concerned with what could be done in order to lessen a time spent in purgatory. This led to a developing system of the sell of indulgences, establishment of chantries, and the doctrine of final purification. None of these practices would survive to the modern day, and as such, in the author's opinion, serve to show a faith community struggling with the nature of death and its relationship with rituals. Outside of their temporal, theological concerns, both the bartering of indulgences and the establishment of chantries for funeral masses are examples of the community trying to grapple with their concerns / mourning the deceased.

Funerary rites were not dismissed with the Protestant Reformation. Rather, the concern of many reformers throughout the process was not with the funeral itself but instead was with the degree at which the associated rites of death were being performed. Luther, Calvin, and Canmer all established the need for the funeral rite within their respective branches of the Reformation. In most cases it was more a return to the earlier

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



views of the Church rather than a complete rewriting of the funerary rites. For example, Luther wished to move away from the Medieval Church's focus on the fear of death to a stronger focus again on the glorious resurrection of the Christians and as such the hymns and psalms of the service that were of a comforting nature. Unfortunately, although we know he presided over them, Luther did not leave any complete funeral services.<sup>25</sup>

### Funeral Rites for the Society of Friends (Quakers)

In the mid-seventeenth century, the Society of Friends started as a counter-cultural movement in England. When the movement began, it was concerned mostly with sharing the nature of a present God in the Living Christ. Friends were an attempt to simplify the worship of God within the congregation. However, as the first generation of the Society began to die, after 1690, concern with death and the spiritual nature therein began to increase. At this time in the Friends' community, the practice became one where “many visitors [from the congregation], including young children, would gather around the dying individual who, in their closest relationship to God, would preach to them.”<sup>26</sup> This practice, and the related manner of recording final death messages, continued within Friends for the next 150 years.

Unlike many denominations, the Society of Friends does not have a unified church government or polity. Each congregation is largely independent from each other and are only loosely associated in groups called Yearly Meetings. Each Yearly Meeting

---

<sup>25</sup> White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 298.

<sup>26</sup> Hugh Barbour and J. William Frost, *The Quakers* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1988), 116. Barbour's & Frost's *The Quakers* is one of the primary modern histories of the Society of Friends. Yet, in the work's 400 plus pages, only 2 paragraphs are dedicated to how Friends grapple with death. The index makes no mention of funerals nor of the Quaker Memorial Service.

has its own book of order, called a Faith and Practice, which outlines the general agreements held by the congregations of that area. In the United States, Yearly Meetings fall under one of three larger, looser groups roughly alined by worship practices and world ministries.<sup>27</sup> Evangelical Friends Church International (EFCI) is a programmed group with pastoral leadership, with worship often mirroring mainline Protestantism. Friends General Conference (FGC) are unprogrammed congregations without a formal clergy. Friends United Meeting (FUM), of which Wilmington Friends is a part, falls in the middle between the other two. FUM is largely programmed congregations, many of which have unprogrammed elements. However there are a number of unprogrammed congregations associated with FUM. Just to make the distinctions more confusing, there are a minority of congregations that are called 'bridge meetings' which belong to two Yearly Meetings and / or Quaker organizations. As one can see, Quaker organization can be confusing, even for attendees within the congregations.

This style of organization within the Society of Friends has many implications for the author's study. First, lacking a true, larger structure akin to many other denominations, Friends have little on which to fall back upon in times of trouble or provide intervention for the local congregations. As such, in each, largely independent, congregation, congregational-based ministries are paramount in order to maintain the health of the group. Second, the local congregation generally observes funerary rites depending on whether a congregation is programmed or unprogrammed. The former tend to have services that look more like traditional Protestant funerals. The latter tend to have what are called Memorial Services which mirror the unprogrammed worshiping style. FUM

---

<sup>27</sup> There is a fourth group called "Conservative Friends" which is a rougher group of three Yearly Meetings (Iowa, North Carolina, and North Carolina Conservative Yearly Meetings). There are also a number of Conservative Friends Meetings not alined with the aforementioned Yearly Meetings scattered in Canada and the New England region. These meetings hold 'unprogrammed' worship.

and bridge meetings can go either way or have a blend of the two services (e.g. an order of worship at a funeral but time for Friends' open worship). As an FUM congregation, it has been the author's experience, that Wilmington Friends Meeting tends to have such blended services. This has been supported by his conversations with congregation members. Third, but very much related, is the independent nature of Friends' organization that brings concern for the ministry of funeral rituals. Remembering the book of order, the Faith and Practice for Wilmington Yearly Meeting (of which Wilmington Friends Meeting is a part), which was last revised and adopted in 1977, holds no instruction nor even guidelines for memorial services.<sup>28</sup> The only content that can be found in the work that pertains to the deceased and / or mourning comes in the discussion of turning in to the Yearly Meeting, written memorials commemorating the deceased:

Memorials for deceased member may be prepared by Ministry and Counsel and forwarded to the Monthly Meeting. If approved by that body, such memorial [sic] shall be entered on its minutes and may be forwarded to the Meeting on Ministry and Counsel of the Quarterly Meeting.

This body may transmit the same, with or without revision to the Yearly Meeting Ministry and Counsel to be read. Names of all deceased member should be forward in like manner.<sup>29</sup>

This is all that is spoken on in the only written production of the Yearly Meeting. This lack of ministerial help or instruction certainly can not help the process of congregations administering help to those in mourning. In a like manner, the primary citation within the work of rituals is a statement against the practice of outward, physical sacraments

---

<sup>28</sup> There have been recent attempts to revise and adopt a new form of Faith and Practice in 2007 and 2008. However, most of these were attempts to clean up and reformat the document rather than making substantive changes to practice or content. Even with such minor changes, Wilmington Yearly Meeting has yet to come to agreement on a reprinting.

<sup>29</sup> *Faith and Practice of the Wilmington Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Book of Discipline)* (Dublin, IN: Print Press, 1977), 66.

(e.g. water baptism, Lord's Supper).<sup>30</sup> Certainly it is in the author's hope that of denominations will possess more for their members that are looking for aid and guidance in the field. It is the author's belief that the confusing nature of Friends' organization and unclear funeral models, prove to be challenging for modern Friends' congregations to clearly adopt a funerary ritual for the care of the congregation.

### Scriptural Foundations

The Canon of combined Hebrew and Christian Scriptures frequently speaks on the issue of proper funerals for the benefit of the society. As a book of life, as Scripture has been called numerous times, it speaks to the culmination of life in the individual's passing and the response of both individual and society. Death is a major theme in Scripture with over 1,300 occurrences of the words *die*, *dead*, and *death*.<sup>31</sup> But even a quick search for the more narrowly focused words *burial*, *bury*, *buried*, and *funeral* occur at least 150 times, depending on translation.<sup>32</sup> Examples of funeral rites and proper funeral behaviors permeate Scripture from Genesis to the Epistles. To illustrate just to what degree this implies the importance of the theme *marry*, *marriage*, and *wedding* also appear approximately 150 times, again depending on translation.<sup>33</sup> Since marriage has been seen as a sacred rite within the Church to be upheld and encouraged, it would only seem reasonable that a similar status be afforded to the rites surrounding burials and funerals.

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 23-24.

<sup>31</sup> Wiersbe, *Ministering to the Mourning*, 27.

<sup>32</sup> "*Burial*" appears 21 times in the TNIV translation. "Bury" appears 44. "Buried" tops the list at 110 occurrences and funeral lags at 5.

<sup>33</sup> Likewise, "*marry*" is used in 48 passages. "*Marriage*" itself is seen 47 times. "*Wedding*" happens 19 times, again all within the TNIV.

Certainly the former grouping of words does not come from positive situations, just as not all of the later grouping are evidence of healthy relationships. The sheer breadth of the theme across the Canon can be interpreted as to its importance in human life. As shall be explained more in detail, even those cases in Scripture that appear at first to have negative connotations can, under scrutiny, yield positive messages for the church and its funerary rites and mourning practices.

### Hebrew Scriptures

In the Hebrew Scriptures, what many in Christianity call the Old Testament, the nature of death is constantly evolving. Death, as it is seen in the Pentateuch, is not the same as that of the High Kingdom nor even that of the Post-Exile Judea. Originally, it appears that the Israelites did not wrestle with the value of death. Instead, the continuity of the tribe(s) was what was seen as paramount.<sup>34</sup> Instead of being focused on the nature of the individual, the value of the individual was seen in relation to those who came after (e.g. their children). At this early point, even with the quite different view of death, the people still wrestled with burial and mourning rites. The first example of people wrestling with loss with mourning rituals is found the death of Jacob in the Book of Genesis.

The first example of a public funeral is found in Genesis 50:1-14 as Joseph mourns and buries his father, Jacob. What is interesting in this passage is that the funeral process is not seen as a quiet, secluded activity for immediate family, but rather it is something that the community at large should participate in as well: “All Pharaoh's officials accompanied him—the dignitaries of his court and all the dignitaries of Egypt—

---

<sup>34</sup> Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 528.

besides all the members of Joseph's household and his brothers and those belonging to his father's household."<sup>35</sup> Certainly part of this communal behavior is in response to Joseph's position in Pharaoh's court. However, just because it was a funeral for an important individual (or in this case, an important individual's relation) does not imply that it was not also important for others. Rather, it is likely that the behavior we see the underlying values of the community surfacing at this politically significant funeral.

This passage is also interesting to note in the situation of funerals in that the death of Jacob happens with unresolved family-based issues. As in the case with many modern situations, although perhaps not the same degree, the death of Jacob refreshes the hurt feelings and distrust within the family.<sup>36</sup> As such, one aspect of the story of Jacob's burial is not just the sending off of the deceased but also a time of reconciliation. Joseph's brothers are concerned without the father to hold the family together anymore, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?"<sup>37</sup> Through the experience of Jacob's death, and perhaps the public funeral, the brothers' relationships are allowed to mend and Joseph begins to accept them again.

In the works of the prophets, one finds a most interesting note on the importance of the funeral. One instance is in Jeremiah 14:11-16. Here, the prophet writes that not having a proper funeral is seen as punishment. It is even considered part of the Divine response to inappropriate action.<sup>38</sup> Jeremiah feels so strongly about this matter that he reintroduces the topic again in 16:1-7, in a section tradition has given the subscript "Day

---

<sup>35</sup> Gen 50: 7b-8.

<sup>36</sup> Leander E. Keck, ed., *New Interpreter's Bible: Genesis to Leviticus (Volume 1)* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 671.

<sup>37</sup> Gen 50:15.

<sup>38</sup> *New Interpreter's Bible: Isaiah through Ezekiel (Volume 6)* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 691.

of Disaster”. The prophet writes: “Do not enter a house where there is a funeral meal; do not go to mourn or show sympathy, because I have withdrawn my blessing, my love and my pity from this people,” declares the LORD.”<sup>39</sup> In this there is a strong prophetic calling against entering into relationship with those from whom God has withdrawn God's favor. When everyone joins in *bet marseah* (the house of mourning) where many of the community come together, Jeremiah is urged to not be a part of the occasion as a foreshadowing of the coming calamity that the people are to experience.<sup>40</sup> Yet, there is an implication that, if the Lord had not withdrawn favor, if the people had instead been blessed in the Lord's eyes, then it would have been appropriate for the people to enter homes and share where there were funeral meals as a sign of mourning and sympathy. If the modern church sees itself as blessed, perhaps its members should be encouraged to practice such communal mourning rites.

After this earlier point in understanding, the people of Israel began to change, as they moved away from their nomadic roots into a time of settlement. With the establishment of the nation of Israel their focus moved away from perpetuating the lineage in the face of extinction to self development of the people and culture. In this case, the people's understanding of rituals and subsequent funeral practice also began to shift. The people began to question their roles in the process of death, as evidenced perhaps best by the Book of Ecclesiastes:

This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead. Anyone who is among the living has

---

<sup>39</sup> Jer 16:5.

<sup>40</sup> *New Interpreter's Bible (Volume 6)*, 702.

hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion! For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even their name is forgotten.<sup>41</sup>

Here the writer of Ecclesiastes, commonly thought to have been writing around the second century B.C.E., states that death is not rewarded in the continuation of the family, as earlier held by the society, but rather that death is simply the end and there is nothing else to look forward towards. While the writing does affirm the existence of a place of the dead (i.e. *sheol*), it appears that this is more like unconsciousness than the modern or post-modern view of an afterlife. Here there is not the collective conscious thought or active soul of the individual, “In the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.”<sup>42</sup> According to the author, there is nothing. Clearly, in addition to the other themes found in the work, Ecclesiastes illustrates an individual who is struggling with the question of life and his / her role therein.

The writer of Ecclesiastes is tempered by a writing also from the Jewish community of the same generation. In the Apocryphal text of Tobit, rather than seeing death as a meaningless end to life, the author appears to understand that funeral rites are appropriate and even necessary. While this book also predated Jesus' ministry by over two centuries, it was likely a familiar writing with the early Christian community because it was favored with the Jewish people of the time.<sup>43</sup> One relevant passage from this text states that:

---

<sup>41</sup> Eccl 9:3-5.

<sup>42</sup> Eccl 9:10.

<sup>43</sup> Calvin J. Roetzel, *The World That Shaped the New Testament* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1985), 97.



I performed many acts of charity to my kindred, those of my tribe. I would give my food to the hungry and my clothing to the naked; and if I saw the dead body of any of my people thrown out behind the wall of Nineveh, I would bury it. I also buried any whom King Sennacherib put to death.<sup>44</sup>

Notice that in this case Tobit speaks that he is even willing to perform such rites in the case of a stranger from the community by saying that he would take care of the burial for a body he found. Tobit sees giving a proper burial as an act of charity because for the Israelites, to remain unburied was seen as an abomination. So, giving burial rites was “considered a work of mercy to bury not only family members but also strangers, even non-Jews.”<sup>45</sup> So to prevent this, Tobit was willing to undertake the task himself. In fact, Tobit sees this as such an important ministry of care that he speaks more about it than any other charity.<sup>46</sup> Looking at the importance of the congregation itself sharing in active ministries, including care of the dead, Irene Nowell states:

Too often we take the easy route, exercising compassion at a distance by writing a check or dropping off a bag of clothes. Tobit's example shows us that sometimes it is necessary to experience other people's misery first hand. What people need is not only financial help but also a human touch . . . We may be repulsed by [the occasion]. Perseverance in the work of mercy, however has a surprising reward. Those whom we serve being in turn to teach us the amazing compassion of God.<sup>47</sup>

Nowell certainly grasps not only the theme behind Tobit but also much of the purpose of the author's project. That is, for the community of God, it is important and significant to

---

<sup>44</sup> Tobit 1:16-18, NRSV.

<sup>45</sup> *New Interpreter's Bible: Kings through Judith (Volume 3)* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 996.

<sup>46</sup> The book of Tobit speaks about the ministry of burying the dead in chapters 1 (twice), 2, 4, 6, and 14.

<sup>47</sup> *New Interpreter's Bible (Volume 3)*, 998.

participate with those we are practicing ministry. For the fellowship to engage in this manner helps to teach and instruct those who are providing the ministry, as well as, those who are being ministered to.

As is the case with any culture, the Jewish people continued to struggle with their relationship with death and the associated mourning rites. As time passed, their involvement in the practice also grew and changed. The evolution of reported rituals as seen from Genesis to Ecclesiastes and Tobit should not necessarily be viewed as dissension or confusion within the community as to the importance of funerary rites. In the book of Genesis the people are largely nomadic moving into becoming agrarian. In such a culture, certain behaviors and practices are more practical than others. In the case of funerary rites, if the tribe is following flocks or in some other long travel (i.e. the Exodus), then a concept of a graveyard or other holy location for bodies would likely be moot. As such, the corresponding rites were likely brief. Jacob's interment was likely unique. Another similar event can be seen in Sarah's burial, also in Genesis.<sup>48</sup> In this passage, Abraham buries his wife in a local plot of land which he purchases. Afterward, the family continues tending the flocks. It is an interesting side note, perhaps germane, that Abraham felt that he had to purchase his wife's burial location rather than to simply let it be gifted to him.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps it is important that those who are in attendance in a burial ritual be required to sacrificially give to the ministry.

In Ecclesiastes and Tobit, the Jewish people have become more urban and focused on agriculture. These lifestyles require a constant presence to be tended. Faced with a sedimentary lifestyle (at least compared to their ancestors), the Jewish people

---

<sup>48</sup> Gen 23:1-20.

<sup>49</sup> Gen 23:13-16.

began to focus on different views and concerns. Burials and the corresponding funerary rites have become established. Certainly by the time of Christ, the Jewish community has a rich, formulated rituals for observing the funeral, as evidenced in the post-Crucifixion behavior of the disciples and followers. In their behavior with Christ's body, we can see how the Jewish people of the time would likely have treated an honored dead (e.g. a rabbi).<sup>50</sup> Moreover, just as the Pre-Christian Jewish community wrestled with the practices of funerals and their relationship to the spiritual family, so too did the budding faith of Christianity. Faced with the healing miracles, as well as, the risen nature of Christ at Easter, while death might have been seen as less of a given nature, it still had incredible sway over the people.

In the Christian Scriptures, we see a number of passages that speak to the communal and powerful nature of funerals and the related mourning. In Luke 7:11-12, “Jesus went to a town . . . as he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her.” This is the beginning of the story of the Widow of Nain. In the culture of the area, to be a widow was to be within a strict social caste. “A 'widow' was a woman no longer under the authority of a male . . . this freedom from male authority could leave a woman in a vulnerable social position.”<sup>51</sup> Without a male to speak on the widow's behalf, she was often taken advantage of and even pushed to the margins of society. According to the Jewish tradition, families were often tasked with care of deceased family members, yet in the Widow of Nain's case with her son dead, no one was

---

<sup>50</sup> Mt 27:57-60.

<sup>51</sup> Carol Meyers, ed., *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 439.

left that could help her in the mourning rites. Confronted with this, it is important to note that in the case of the widow who lost her only a son, certainly a small family, the whole community shared in the mourning with the widow. Jesus does not instruct the town that they should not be performing these rites. Rather Christ states directly to the widow, not the mourning congregation, “don't cry” and immediately moves to heal the son.<sup>52</sup> It is important to note that Christ's message is not an urging to the community that they should not mourn but rather that the widow herself should not mourn because of imminent healing of her son. As such, Jesus' action should not be seen as a refutation of funeral rites. Truly, just before he comes forth to perform his miracle, “Luke depicts Jesus as one of the large crowd that makes up the funeral procession. Like all those present, he shows empathy for the widow.”<sup>53</sup> In this case, Christ seems to embrace the community's funeral rites. This is certainly echoed in Christ's teaching “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”<sup>54</sup> In a related text, where again it appears that Jesus is speaking against funerals is found in Luke 8: 40-56. Here, Luke writes: “‘Stop wailing,’ Jesus said. ‘She is not dead but asleep.’”<sup>55</sup> However this is again not a condemnation of mourning rituals but rather of the need for mourning since the girl had already been healed. This would appear to imply that if the girl was (and stayed) deceased then the mourning would have been appropriate.

---

<sup>52</sup> Lk 7:12-15.

<sup>53</sup> Meyers, *Women in Scriptures*, 440.

<sup>54</sup> Mt 5:4.

<sup>55</sup> Lk 8:52.

Certainly Jesus was not ignorant of the human need to mourn while he was teaching. In fact, according to the belief that Jesus had an understanding of his pending sacrifice, the Gospels frequently have allusions to a time when Jesus' followers will also mourn (his loss). A noteworthy example of this is found in Matthew: "Jesus answered, 'How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.'"<sup>56</sup> In this passage the time for mourning here is marked by a fasting of the disciples. Another case of Christ's interactions with funerary rites can be found in Matthew 26: 6-12 where an unnamed woman anoints Jesus' head to the ire of the disciples. Jesus responds to their anger by telling them not to bother the woman performing the ritual. Christ explained by saying, "She has done a beautiful thing to me . . . When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial."<sup>57</sup> In this, Jesus clearly states that performing burial and anointing rites, part of the larger funeral rites, are justified and even beautiful. The story of a woman anointing Christ for burial is powerful enough to appear in all four canonical Gospels.<sup>58</sup>

Even in the case of Christ's own death, when Mary Magdalene returns to the disciples to tell of the Resurrection, according to one tradition she finds them in the middle of their communal mourning.<sup>59</sup> Faced with the loss of a member of their community, the disciples band together in consolation and mourning. While this passage might not have been original to the text, as noted in multiple translations, it was a part of

---

<sup>56</sup> Mt 9:15.

<sup>57</sup> Mt 26:10b, 12.

<sup>58</sup> Meyers, *Women in Scriptures*, 435.

<sup>59</sup> Mk 16:9-10.

the longer ending of Mark well known by the second century C.E.<sup>60</sup> As such, the mourning practiced by the disciples likely represents a nature or theme within the culture of the earlier church and / or Jewish community of that time.

The importance of mourning and funeral rites continued to be an important force in the early church as seen in the writing of the Epistles. With the tragedy of the first martyr, Stephen, the faith community came together and mourned his loss.<sup>61</sup> The mourning behavior of the early church is supported by the writings of Paul. In his letter to the Romans, Paul advises: “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”<sup>62</sup> Certainly in the tumultuous times of the early church, the funerary rite was a bonding and reassuring time by being held as a time of communal mourning. Stanley Stowers encourages this to be read not just as an off-handed remark of kindness but rather as a communal ethic for the new church. Faced with the experience of loss, Stowers sees in Paul's message a call to meet “people on their level rather than being distant . . . to share in the emotional experience of others.”<sup>63</sup> Should not then the modern church, faced with the current stresses by the external world, find strength in our communal mourning?

---

<sup>60</sup> Keck, *New Interpreter's Bible (Volume 8)*, 728.

<sup>61</sup> Acts 8:2.

<sup>62</sup> Rm 12:15.

<sup>63</sup> Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, & Gentiles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 319.

### Anthropological Foundations

The Jewish culture that gave birth to the Christian movement has a rich tradition of mourning and funeral practices that extended beyond the individual and immediate family. Perhaps it is these practices that the early church was using in their own hour of need.<sup>64</sup> While there is not one funeral rite that extends throughout Scripture into modern Jewish practice, there are some traditional ways the Jewish community observes death commonly referred to as *shiva*. *Shiva* is the time of mourning and remembering of a deceased individual that lasts a full twelve months with differently levels of mourning and practices.<sup>65</sup> While observing the *shiva* as a mourner is traditionally reserved for the closest of relatives, the observance itself requires the participation of the whole community. During the *avelut* and *sheloshim*, or third and fourth stages of *shiva* (seven and thirty days respectively), it falls upon the community to be present and care for those who mourn. The faith community is thus encouraged to participate with the family as active participants rather than passive observers. The mourning process is flushed out fuller through the formal unveiling of the monument of the deceased at the end of the *shiva*, the *yizkor* memorial prayers, and the yearly *yahrzeit* remembrance.<sup>66</sup> Compare this to the two day, or in many cases just a single day, that are observed in the American

---

<sup>64</sup> Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 21.

<sup>65</sup> Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*, (New York: Johnathan David Publishers, 2000), 79.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 194-207.

culture for funeral and mourning rites. In comparison, it seems a reasonable question to ask if the American culture is trying to look away from the process of grieving too quickly.

Many other peoples of the world celebrate and remember an individual's passing through ritual. The Hindus of India have a fully articulated manner of mourning and how those close to the deceased interact with the community. Pittu Laungani gives such an account of the ritual and practices surrounding a wealthy individual's death in his article "Death in a Hindu Family."<sup>67</sup> Therein, Laungani reflects on the communal nature of the Hindu funeral as guests and community members are invited into the mourning household. This communal nature mirrors some of the patterns seen in the Jewish tradition of *shiva*.

In fact, it seems most cultures across the world and deep into time have well understood roles and processes through which the dead and the mourning receive their respective care. The unfortunate exception to this near universality appears to be modern America. In most of these, the community has a strong connection to the funeral rite. Bregman refers to this prevalence across tribal cultures, with a specific eye towards the Native Americans, "[Their] religion involves a 'tribe', a community of person, who accompany and participate in the rituals . . . [they] depend not on atomistic individuality but on a wider network of support for their religious and ritual lives."<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> Pittu Laungani, "Death in a Hindu Family," in *Death and Bereavement Across Cultures*, edited by Colin Murray Parkes and others (London: Routledge, 1997), 52-72.

<sup>68</sup> Lucy Bregman, *Death and Dying, Spirituality and Religions: A Study of the Death Awareness Movement* (New York: American University Studies, 2003), 188.



### Theological Foundations

Death is one of the questions of human existence that all faiths and most philosophies try to make sense of. As the writer and pastor Paul Sheppy wrote, this is likely since “death is consuming in its urgency; its advent leaves none unchanged. Other priorities are set aside, and attention is forced . . . upon the immediacy of what has occurred.”<sup>69</sup> Death, and the related Christian ritual of funeral, are always reflections on the Church's thought and belief. Therefore, it is necessary that the ministers in Christ's Church point towards an answer of Christ in times of loss. For, as Sheppy notes, “If we do not offer Christ's answer [to death], in what sense has the funeral been a Christian one?”<sup>70</sup>

So, a reasonable place to begin is with the concept of who the ministers are of the local congregation. It should be noted in this that the focus is on the ministers of the congregation and not the ordained clergy. In focusing on the ministers, the concern falls on those individuals who carry they ministry of the congregation. The Society of Friends holds strongly to the idea that they are a congregational system. The common description held by Friends is that the local congregation is comprised of “a priesthood of all believers”. That is to say that Friends uphold the concept of universal ministry within the congregation.<sup>71</sup> This is a theological idea that is mirrored in much of the Protestant

---

<sup>69</sup> Paul Sheppy, *In Sure and Certain Hope: Liturgies, Prayer, and Readings for Funerals and Memorials* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>71</sup> Jack Willcuts, *Why Friends are Friends: Some Quaker Core Convictions* (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 2002), 45.

churches. Martin Luther introduced an idea of general and shared priesthood in his *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* in 1520.<sup>72</sup>

That the pope or bishop anoints, makes tonsures, ordains, consecrates, or dresses differently from the laity, may make a hypocrite or an idolatrous oil-painted icon, but it in no way makes a Christian or spiritual human being. In fact, we are all consecrated priests through Baptism, as St. Peter in 1 Peter 2[:9] says, "You are a royal priesthood and a priestly kingdom," and Revelation [5:10], "Through your blood you have made us into priests and kings."<sup>73</sup>

Shortly after, Luther continued by stating in *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* that:

How then if [the papacy is] forced to admit that we are all equally priests, as many of us as are baptized, and by this way we truly are; while to them is committed only the Ministry and consented to by us? If they recognize this they would know that they have no right to exercise power over us except insofar as we may have granted it to them, for thus it says in 1 Peter 2, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom." In this way we are all priests, as many of us as are Christians. There are indeed priests whom we call ministers. They are chosen from among us, and who do everything in our name. That is a priesthood which is nothing else than the Ministry. Thus 1 Corinthians 4:1: "No one should regard us as anything else than ministers of Christ and dispensers of the mysteries of God."<sup>74</sup>

While it is true that most of the Protestant and Holiness denominations and faiths abandon the concept of priesthood as practiced by the Catholic or Orthodox churches in favor of a hired, professional clergy, this teaching of universal priesthood still pervades their thought. Traditionally this has been utilized to speak about the nature of not requiring an intermediary in prayer.

---

<sup>72</sup> Project Wittenberg, "An Open Letter to The Christian Nobility: by Martin Luther (1483-1546)," Walther Library, <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/web/nblty-03.html> (accessed March 3, 2009).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

A modern parallel to the shared ministry is suggested by the professor Allan Hugh Cole Jr. In his book *Be Not Anxious*, Cole recommends that the local congregation be viewed as a place of stories.<sup>75</sup> These stories and the experiences of those who are worshiping with the congregation now in addition to those who came before. In forming their stories, people begin to construct a view of their condition by grappling with their experiences through the use of language. The value of the congregation lies in that the individual is not alone. The power comes for the individual who is wrestling with an aspect of their life, such as the change inherent with a recent loss of a loved one, in being able to “locate and relocate [themselves] in the multiple stories.”<sup>76</sup> Through this relocation of the self, the mourner can “break open a new reality [of self]” helping the individual to find relief from her / his anxiety.<sup>77</sup> Certainly the story of God, Christ, and Holy Spirit are of paramount importance for the process to work in the congregational setting. However, what is nearly as important, is that the congregation is present. Namely, that the mourning individual has other individuals of the congregation to be present throughout the events so that the stories may be retold and rewritten. Unfortunately, one class of people that are commonly excluded from the story telling at funerals is children.

The author was amazed and befuddled when confronted with the number of individuals in the course of his research who were excluded from congregational or communal funerary rites. It has been well understood by theologians that exclusion of youth and children will have a detrimental effect on their spiritual development and

---

<sup>75</sup> Allan Hugh Cole Jr., *Be Not Anxious: Pastoral Care of Disquieted Souls* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 170-171.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 177.

connection to the community. In fact, as the Franciscan William Cieslak wrote, “Participating in funerals of others is healthy, nor ghoulish . . . no one, not even the young, should be 'spared' this experience. Death is a reality of life for everyone.”<sup>78</sup>

The widely regarded father of Christian education movement, Horace Bushnell remarked that neither the church nor its members should ever treat children or youths as inferior disciples or spiritual beings as compared to the adult members of the congregation. In doing so, the congregation will discourage the child's spiritual growth.<sup>79</sup> While he was focusing most on what is now called Christian education, Bushnell seemed to hint even at this project's aim: namely, to include everyone in congregation in the practice of rituals of the church. “Draw [children] into your own exercises, taking always for granted, that they will be with you. Promise them a common part with you in God's friendship.”<sup>80</sup>

If the message of Christ to children challenges the modern reader in any manner, that is certainly going to be related to the challenge of Christ to serve the least of the society – the outcasts and the ignored. Children and youth are frequently one of the ignored during times of mourning, but there is another group that are often kept outside the care of the Church and its congregations: suicide victims. There are traditions within the Church that have maintained that the taking of one's own life will keep that individual out of God's presence and Heaven. The problem with this thought is that it has a very tenuous Scriptural basis. The clearest citation against suicide might be the commandment

---

<sup>78</sup> William Cieslak, *Console One Another: Commentary on the Order of Christian Funerals* (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1990), 81.

<sup>79</sup> Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 373.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

against murder.<sup>81</sup> However this does appear to be a bit of a stretch in interpretation. When one looks at the second half of the commandments in Exodus 20:12-17, one can see that all of these commands are social in nature. Each commands a level of behavior between two people. By the nature of suicide, it is an activity entirely within the individual. This idea of murder / killing in the commandments as an act against someone else is upheld in the rest of the Canon.<sup>82</sup> It is also possible that condemnation of suicide could be interpreted from some of Paul's teachings, such as 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 where he says that the individual body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and “therefore honor God with your bodies.” However, using it in this way is more an attempt to proof-texting an issue rather than conclusive condemnation of suicide. For when the pericope is taken with the rest of the passage in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, it becomes quite clear what Paul is speaking about is anything but suicide.

This argument, however, should not be misconstrued as condoning suicide. Somewhere, there does seem to be something within the human equation that affirms that suicide is wrong. Yet this is not to say that it is evil. Suicide is wrong in the same manner that any tragedy is wrong, and suicide is certainly a tragedy. It happens when an individual believes that there are no other options that are available or that all other options require more pain. As such, when one looks at suicide as a matter of pain and hurt, one must see the need for the healing nature of Christ's Church. This is true independent of whether a suicide attempt is successful or not. If the attempt is not successful, then the author wishes that the individual receive pastoral and professional

---

<sup>81</sup> Ex 20:13.

<sup>82</sup> In the TNIV, there are 80 citations of “murder” and in every case, the murder is an action of one person against another person. “Suicide” does not appear in the TNIV, NIV, NASB, NKJV, ESV, or in the NRSV. The only exception might be in the subscript to Mt 27:3-8 which in some Bibles is titled “The Suicide of Judas”, however the word suicide itself does not appear within the text.

care with all due speed. If the attempt is successful, that the Church must open its arms to receive the fallen individual and that individual's loved ones. The Church is needed because, as one scholar puts it:

No suicide is an isolated social or spiritual experience. Any suicide creates a wake of consequences that touch a lot of shoreline in current and future generations. The silence that often conceals suicide in shame does not prevent the death from affecting those who survive it.<sup>83</sup>

Not only allowing, but actively welcoming into the Church the family and friends of the suicide victim can actively help the grief process of those affected. In encouraging a Christian funeral for these sad cases, the Church acknowledges that as humans, we only begin our stories; we leave the final chapters to God's care. The Church does not, nor should ever, state that anyone is beyond the care of our Living God. For these individuals and their relations are looking for liberation of their pain, either in the act of suicide, or in the ritual that the Church can provide.

If one is willing to reanalyze the common conceptions of Liberation theology, focusing instead in light of the funeral ritual as social justice, it can be discerned that the combined Liberation model has much to say on the practice of funeral rites and their practice within the community. All Liberation theologies center their understanding on the need for the oppressor and the oppressed for reconciliation between the two. The thought is that an unequal balance in power by humanity fails to live up to God's expectations and wishes. If this is the case and the Divine wishes that all people are equally and reasonably cared for, then the process by which the community mourns would be related. Moltmann once wrote that “oppression of human beings by other

---

<sup>83</sup>Harold Ivan Smith, *A Long Shadowed Grief: Suicide and Its Aftermath* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2006), 21.

human beings . . . is always a crime against life. For human life is life in community and communication . . . to oppress other people means to cut oneself off from god too.”<sup>84</sup> The question is: Does failing to provide a congregation through which mourners can continue their grief process through the performance of rituals constitute oppression? Working from a few assumptions, one can easily infer that withholding such rites, either maliciously or benignly, is oppressive.

In order to show that this is the case, it is helpful to examine a few historical cases. In one example, imagine that a man from Africa is captured and sold into slavery in the southern British Colonies. In his new world on the plantation, the individual is forced to adopt the master's religion and stop practicing his own faith and its rituals. If such an individual chooses to continue in her / his original faith, the individual would likely have to practice such rituals in secret for fear of angering the master. Certainly this would be a case that can be seen as oppressive. In another case, a woman is captured in a southern German city in the 1930's. Identified as a Jew, the woman is taken to an internment camp. There, she has to follow the rules of the guards. She has to abandon her own faith and cultural history so as to survive in this new location. Again, a strong majority would likely share that she is a victim and this is a case of oppression.

In a similar manner, one can imagine thinking of the community at large, forcing the individual or family to walk through the process by themselves as a theological teaching. This is compared to the normally held concept that people who are the source of oppression, have this status due to their violent acts. Today, our citizens are experiencing a distancing from Christ's church and its traditional rites of mourning not due to

---

<sup>84</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 185.

repression that is violent and aggressive but rather due to apathy and laziness. While this certainly looks quite different than the traditional liberation theologies of feminism or black theology, it still centers on the oppressor (those who do not care enough to attend the ritual) and the oppressed (the grieving family and / or friends of the deceased). As Moltmann is credited as saying “oppression destroys humanity on both sides. The oppressor acts inhumanly and the victim is dehumanized.”<sup>85</sup> Certainly in failing to help with the burial practices and rituals of someone in need, the congregation can see themselves and behaving inhumanly – that is, against human nature. In this case, human nature is to gather at the committal of a loved one. This alienation from this normal human practice is dehumanizing.

Thinking of the implications of a dehumanized reality, one has to wonder about the implications of funerary rites in this postmodern age. While postmodernism is increasingly difficult to define, the Compact Oxford English Dictionary refers to postmodernism as “a style and concept in the arts characterized by distrust of theories and ideologies and by the drawing of attention to conventions.”<sup>86</sup> It is true that in the postmodern world there has been some rediscovering of earlier truths for a sense of grounding, what appears to be common and given to more limelight are the “postmodernists who take the trajectory of contingency and relativity to a ruthless extreme,” yielding a loss of hope and cynicism.<sup>87</sup> To this new world and culture, the

---

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Compact Oxford English Dictionary, “Postmodernism,” [http://www.askoxford.com/concise\\_oed/postmodernism](http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/postmodernism), (accessed April 24, 2009).

<sup>87</sup> Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology for This Urgent Time* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 36, 39.



church and its rituals must find some functional answer to Dawn's question: "What can the Church offer in the face of . . . [the] postmodern despair? How does our worship deal with the intensity and scope of suffering?"<sup>88</sup>

Wherever the individual within the current culture finds themselves, it can be without a doubt that the Church is now serving in a world of questions. Part of the answer to these questions must be a return and reaffirmation of the Church's rituals. In doing so, the effort can be shifted from the side of postmodernism that is despair-filled to the side that is searching for a grounding of experience. This reaffirmation must not come from only the pulpit (i.e. the exhortations of a member of the clergy) but be met in form to the presence and participation of the pews. The ritual is paramount because:

Gestures made in ritual moments provide a universal means of expressing grief and marking, with dignity, the importance of lives lost which meet, at least in part, some of the spiritual needs of those participating.<sup>89</sup>

There is a definite need for that participation. For while this age has been marked with a tearing down of established ideals, it has left behind a very real vacuum of human experience. Today, in this postmodern age, there is an incredible want for interconnectedness and community. One can witness this in the recent explosion of telecommunication community that tended to create a false community for the lost. However, the Church can do better job of providing community. To practice ritual, particularly the ritual of funeral and mourning, in community is to answer some of that need.

---

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>89</sup> Ewan Kelly, *Meaningful Funerals*, 24.

### Theoretical Foundations

Instead of maintaining our connection to the funeral rites and communal mourning, modern America has largely turned the practice over to a specialized, quasi-religious (at best) industry with its own source of goals and desires. As a business, the funeral industry's concern for the operators and workers must be more located in the world of finance than in the world of spirituality and community care.<sup>90</sup> This is not to assert that these businesses are evil per se. In fact, the funeral service industry often has a rich relationship with local clergy.<sup>91</sup> It has been the author's experience that in many cases funeral directors will flex to accommodate wishes of presiding clergy and family. The relationship does not have to be hostile. Rather the clergy and faith community should be aware that the funeral home is a business and as such has different priorities than the Church and its community. It is important for the family and the officiating clergy to be aware of all options for a funeral service and be able to properly voice them to the funeral director at an appropriate time.

---

<sup>90</sup> Mary Roach, *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 79.

It is interesting to note that the first, modern use of embalming was for expressly a money making venture. During the Civil War, Dr. Thomas Holms found a way to replace a dead soldier's blood with an arsenic compound so as to impede body degradation so that the body could be shipped back to the family at the family's expense. It is not surprising that the number of officers so preserved greatly outnumbered the enlisted soldiers who were embalmed. The officers tended to come from wealthier families who could afford Holms' rates. The process was so lucrative that soon the originator had competition. Having its foundation as a commercial practice rather than a religious rite, one has to wonder if there is enough reason to sanction embalming today, or to take a view of the body of the deceased, much like our Jewish kin: a holy part of God's creation deserving to be left in its natural state.

<sup>91</sup> Gary Laderman, *Rest in Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 68-69.

Yet, even before the funeral home and its practitioners of mortuary science are brought into the occasion of a loss, another business, the medical industry, often has prolonged control of the mourning processes. Dr. Kubler-Ross refers to this situation by stating that “dying nowadays is more gruesome in many ways, namely, more lonely, mechanical, and dehumanized,” by the treatment of hospitals and medical specialists.<sup>92</sup> She continues later on by stating that religion has traditionally helped both the dying individual, as well as, the affected community by giving an understanding and meaning to suffering in the promise of an afterlife.<sup>93</sup> However, in Dr. Kubler-Ross' studies, she found that in the modern American culture, this is a role that has been lost. Instead of faith helping the culture to deal with the reality of passing, she writes a disturbing realization:

Religious patients seemed to differ little from those without a religion. . . . [we] can say that we found very few truly religious people with an intrinsic faith. . . . The majority of patients were in between with some form of religious belief but not enough to relieve them of conflict and fear.<sup>94</sup>

If this is the case, then clearly the Church is not helping the majority of individuals to process the realities of mortal life and its passing. This could be seen as a call to clergy and laity within the community to share together in such a way as to aid in the relief 'of conflict and fear' as Kubler-Ross implies is needed. Our communities need healing times of good mourning. The ritual of funeral is also a preventative measure, it often can safely tap deep emotions rather than allowing these feelings to manifest later in a destructive manner. As Driver shares:

---

<sup>92</sup> Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, 21.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

Ritual controls emotion while releasing it, and guides it while letting it run. Even in a time of grief, ritual lets joy be present through the permission to cry, lets tears become laughter, if they will, by making place for the fullness of tears' intensity – all this in the presence of communal assertiveness.<sup>95</sup>

This deep value to the funeral rite is not to be entered lightly. These mourning times need to be entered into by the clergy and laity that support them as serious undertaking. For, as the Rabbi Chaim Rozwaski writes:

All of us can remember instances when a good person's last journey on earth was marred by bad weather, an inappropriate eulogy, or even a regrettably misguided funeral. Such events only add to the grief and pain of the survivors.<sup>96</sup>

While humanity does not, as of yet, have control over the weather; the other factors Rabbi Rozwaski mentions are within our control. In order to not add to the pain that the community is experiencing, clergy and community need to work together to bring into being a constructive, healthy time of mourning. Or, as another author puts it, “Every word or sentence you utter becomes the important thing that will either evoke grief or will hinder it.”<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Driver, *Liberating Rites*, 156.

<sup>96</sup> Chaim Z. Rozwaski, *Jewish Meditations on the Meaning of Death* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1994), 11.

<sup>97</sup> Gene Fowler, *Caring through the Funeral: A Pastor's Guide* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004), 133.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODOLOGY AND STRATEGY

The methodology used for this project was a multi-faceted approach. The basic concepts were shared through sermons, Bible studies, and Adult Sunday School classes. The concept was further explored through a weekend workshop, also containing a pre and post test questionnaire. Hopefully, in this time the congregation started to become a functional net into which those outside from the community will be able to fall when faced with death and loss. The work will also reference a number of personal testimonials from interviews as to experiences of funerals and congregational response to death.

The workshop was used to flush out the community's understanding of functional and beneficial funerals. These educational times are important for, “Death is a metaphysical issue, a theological issue . . . it is *the* theological issue.”<sup>1</sup> These smaller and focused groups will provide participants an opportunity to ask questions, share what they have learned, and identify events that have occurred in their own lives and the life of the congregation / community.

---

<sup>1</sup> Eugene H. Peterson and others, *The Leadership Library Volume 10: Weddings, Funerals, and Special Events* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1987), 72.

It is hoped that studies in Scripture will encourage participants to become aware of the grace that the Divine has for those in the process of grief and that grieving is a praiseworthy action.<sup>2</sup> Data collection from the workshop and the different studies series will be based on questionnaires, while the data collection from the nature of a functional funeral will come directly from the answers and collected responses of those who participated in the process.

The functional funeral is an important facet of a faith community's communal life. In the funeral rites, each person is important, including the grieving family, supportive friends, musicians, spoken word pastors, and even the physically present. The basis of this work will be centered on the process soul (and memory) searching, discernment, engaging Scripture, prayer, and open worship.

---

<sup>2</sup> While the process of mourning and grieving is very natural for a human, it, like a natural behavior, can become consuming. That is to say that an individual can become lost within their grief. The danger of this is more pronounced when the individual suffers from an emotional illness of some form (e.g. clinical depression). In order to safeguard against this possibility, again the congregation is urged to encourage communal mourning rituals and worship participation. These services give the support network for the struggling individual, as well as, allows others to monitor the individual's condition and behavior. If a lay person ever suspects that something might be amiss in another's grief, that person should speak with a trained clergy member immediately.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FIELD EXPERIENCE**

When the author started his research into this field, it quickly became clear that a study of bereavement rituals was both needed and feared. The study and conversation of the ritual and manner of funerals appears to illicit strong reactions. Some individuals had a visceral response to any practice that reminded them of their mortal nature whereas others responded that somehow, in the postmodern age the intellectual individual should be beyond funerary rites. The bulk of people spoken to, however, were those who thought that something should be done, in the case of funerary rites, but were unsure what those actions were or how to perform said actions.

#### **Beginning the Process**

Early in the time of research, the author was asked to speak about this doctoral project at a gathering of fourteen senior women of the congregation. The gathering wanted to know what the author was studying. When he reflected that his study was looking at the process through which congregations and communities grieve, namely funerary rites, the author received a strong, negative reaction, such as:

*“Why would you want to study that?”*

*“Oh, no.”*

*“Did the school approve that?”*

*“That is kind of dark, isn't it?”*

*“Let's not talk about this now.”*

It is the last comment that really stuck in the author's mind and encouraged him forward in conversation. He was invited to share his research, and there appeared to be something in this group to analyze with these strong reactions.

Deciding to continue his time of sharing, the author reiterated his study quickly followed by questions for the gathered group. The questions, in an informal setting, centered on an individual's preparation for their own and family member's deaths. About a third of the gathered group (about 4 individuals) shared that they did, in fact, have plans for their own services. One individual knew of her husband's desires. None of the gathered fellowship had their wishes known to the congregation's minister or office.

Two respondents' replies to the conversation especially bear consideration. First, one individual who was in her mid-nineties shared that she was looking forward to her passing and wanted a place to speak about it. At this sharing, a number of members of the group tried to convince this individual that these were not her true feelings. Instead, they recommended that this was a result of losing her son earlier that year to cancer or the loss of many of her long time friends. One group member told this individual that she was merely having a 'dark' or 'down' day and that tomorrow she would not want to think of such things. Some of the group was silent at this time, but no one encouraged the individual's desires to speak about her own pending death.

Certainly, her death is pending. Anyone's death is pending in the future, as we are mortal beings. The chances of someone who is ninety plus years old are certainly higher than those who are younger. However, all do have death “knocking at the door” in some



manner. The other dismissive, and nearly oppressive, nature of this conversation is how the individual shared that she wanted to speak about her own passing, but her own faith community, save the author, was not ready to hear her on the matter. She had, in fact, lost a grown child earlier that year. In private conversations with the author, she had reflected that the majority of her friends were dead and the majority of those alive were infirm. She had already buried her husband. In the twilight years of her life, she often spoke of losing her mother as a young girl. Death is a diligent companion in this individual's life, but her faith community is less diligent with it as it does not want to help her with the concept. The author finds this to be disturbing to say the least.

Approximately halfway through the conversation time, another individual shared that the conversation was making her uncomfortable. As a sixty plus year old retiree, the individual commented that she did not want to speak about funerals or death based on the idea that if the community was to speak on them it could increase the chances of their occurring within the community. Asked about the statement later, the individual shared that this was an off-the-cuff statement, yet the author believes this is a parapraxis,<sup>1</sup> and the individual might have shared her true thoughts.<sup>2</sup> Somewhere, confronted with the shocking topic of confronting funerary rites, the individual shared her very real concern that her action (or inaction) could increase the frequency of death. Certainly opened up to reason and scrutiny, few would be willing to defend this position publicly but may have this belief personally. It is unfortunate, but:

---

<sup>1</sup> A parapraxis is what is commonly referred to as a 'Freudian slip', so named after the famous psychologist.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Baars, ed., *Experimental Slips and Human Error: Exploring the Architecture of Volition* (New York, NY: Plenum Publishers, 1992), 6-7.

The current thought is that fear related slips, such as those situations speaking or dealing with death, are twice as likely as normal situations of conversation.

In Western society, the majority of people still find the subject of death taboo. Death has become increasingly privatized and sanitized; an event which occurs at arm length and out of sight of the majority.<sup>3</sup>

Kelly continues later by saying that “death has become an event we experience second hand;”<sup>4</sup> the author proposes in light of this individual's response, that death is an experience some would *prefer* to experience second hand. The most reasonable manner to confront this fear would seem to bring the subject out into the open. Rather than let the world of death and funerals remain in the shadow, it should be brought into the light so that individuals are not as afraid of the subject, hence reducing their shock or discomfort.

As a whole, this open discussion forum was a fruitful time for the author to discern how the congregation and community might respond to the work on funerary rites. While the time certainly began negatively, by the end of the time, more and more individuals were sharing very real and practical concerns about funerary rites, such as the need for embalming and how much intervention by the funeral industry is required. The informal discussion eventually lasted for over two hours with the author and a few others needing to continue in their respective days.

The field experience continued formally, on December 28, 2008 as the author shared a sermon named: “A Blue Christmas & a Hard New Year” which centered on the passage in the Gospel of John where Christ comes to visit Lazarus in the tomb and grieve with the family.<sup>5 6</sup> The name of this sermon is a play on the familiar greeting: “Merry

---

<sup>3</sup> Ewan Kelly, *Meaningful Funerals: Meeting the Theological and Pastoral Challenge in a Postmodern Era* (New York, NY: Mowbray, 2008), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Jn 11:17-37.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix A.

Christmas and a Happy New Year.” The sermon centers on the dichotomy of our culture's strong tendency of portraying Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years as happy events on the one hand, and on the other such times, for many, can actually be times of acute loneliness and pain. That is to say, while our cultural attitude is reflected with tinsel and lights, many feel dark and sad at this time. The winter holidays can each be their own personal hell for those who have lost their loved one in the previous year. Truly, there are even those for whom the holidays are continued sources of pain and discomfort even after the first year of their loss. This experience can be exacerbated, or at least not alleviated, by mourners who attend services with their home congregations at this time. The festivities of the Church during this season tend to be similarly full of children's pageants, caroling, and cantatas. Where does the grieving individual find solace in this experience? It is uncomfortable to be sad and forlorn when those around you are making merry. It is only fun to kiss someone under the mistletoe *if* you have someone to kiss.

The sermon's primary reading came from the Gospel of John 11. In this passage, it is important to note that Christ does indeed grieve at the loss of his friend in John 11:35-36: “Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’” He does not put on a brave face or mask his true feelings. In fact, throughout the Gospel stories, Jesus frequently appears to openly live his emotions (e.g. anger, frustration, joy, sorrow).<sup>7</sup> As followers of Christ, it makes sense that we should respond in kind to the teacher's example. As shared in the sermon, “So this Christmas, I give you – and even more important – God gives you

---

<sup>7</sup> Of the variety of emotions shown by Jesus in the Gospels, one can find weeping (e.g. Jn 11:35, Lk 19:41), joy (e.g. Lk 10:21), anger (e.g. Jn 2:13-17, Mt 21:12-13, Mk 11:15-18, Lk 19:45-46) and even frustration with his disciples (e.g. Mt 17:19-20).

permission to feel your feelings: whether that is the joy and wonder that the season brings out, or sadness and grief over a loss.”<sup>8</sup> By Christ weeping when he is sad, so too are we given permission to weep when we are sad also.

Certainly a winter holiday season that only focuses on the happy memories fails to appreciate the fullness of the story. The traditional and mythical source of American Thanksgiving centers on the experiences of the the Pilgrims of Plymouth, Massachusetts. The celebration came after the times of trial and hardship the settlers suffered. For the Christmas holiday, Christians turn to their synoptic gospels to tell them of the first Christmas. Certainly even a cursory reading makes it abundantly clear that the series of events that comprise Christmas are comprised of at least as many times of sadness and endings as times of celebration and joy. There is the fright associated with Mary's status of virgin while unmarried with her becoming pregnant (certainly a frightening event for her time and culture), the loss of Zechariah's voice, the Holy Family's flight to Egypt, event the approach of the angels was marked with fear. While infrequently spoken on, the Gospel of Matthew shares one such even in 2:16-18 where Herod orders the death of all male children under two years of age in the countryside surrounding Bethlehem. The passage ends with the sobering: “Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”<sup>9</sup> It would then stand to reason that we can take the time to share with those of our congregation who are also weeping for their loved ones are “no more” with them.

---

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>9</sup> Mt 2:18b.

In the author's tradition, the Society of Friends, there is often a time for self reflection and public comment called “open worship” or “worship in the manner of Friends.” For Wilmington Friends, this time normally lasts between five to ten minutes depending on how much sharing happens, with normally one to three individuals speaking. On the day with the author shared the sermon on a “Blue Christmas”, four people spoke out of the silence – a little more than average. What was more remarkable about this time is who felt moved / comfortable in sharing. Two of those who shared are individuals who frequently share. One more was a person who rarely shares, perhaps a few times in the author's then three plus years with the congregation. All of these individuals reiterated in some way that they either were having or have had prior years when the holidays were challenging times. The fourth individual who shared was a longtime member of the congregation who lost her husband over fifteen years prior. She shared that Christmas and New Years were frequently hard for her after losing her husband and that she appreciated a message that acknowledged her feelings. What made this unusual is that this is the first time anyone could remember her sharing at this moment in worship. Somehow this morning's message or message topic helped her to share what had been troubling her for years.

While these occurrences seem largely positive, this message topic did receive a fair amount of criticism. However, where as the praise, or perhaps more affirmation, was public, the critiques were private or in committee. Three individuals shared in Ministry and Counsel (the Friends' equivalent to an Elders' Board) that they felt that the subject was too dark for a Christmas service. Another group felt that it was appropriate for the season as a number of people shared that they felt it was in fact reasonable. At this point,

the author reminded the committee that this service was officially after Christmas, although as a matter of orthopraxis it was within the time of Advent being before Epiphany, and as such did not disrupt the congregation's traditional services.

With these two experiences, the author concluded that he should not take an overt approach to his topic as he had originally planned. His concern was that if he continued to make sermons and discussions groups / studies specifically about the subject of the congregation and their response to funerary rites, the end result would be that while some were validated in their grief, a core of individual's would be further alienated from process. As such, the congregation's response to grief and funerals would not be improved but rather the study would polarize the congregation. Instead, the author chose to take another, more oblique route for his work with the congregation. He decided to focus on hinting within sermons and studies at the congregation's involvement in bereavement. Rather than overtly discussing the topic, he would carefully mention the concept in a variety of different venues to subtly raise awareness. This process would be culminated with a workshop in the summer and supplemented by a number of individual interviews.

One such place where the author attempted to subtly raise awareness of community mourning and shared ritual was in a preaching series on the Psalms. One of the easiest, and clearest examples of this approach was in a sermon on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. It is a favorable a passage that many know either in part or in whole. Here, the author shared the traditional (and still relevant) interpretation that this is a Psalm of Thanksgiving, which intended to provide a sense of comfort to the listener / reader. It was shared with the congregation that one of the many occasions when this Psalm is heard is in funerals or

in times of grief. Part of the reason for sharing the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm at any time is its warm and comforting pastoral scene (e.g. green pastures, quiet water, etc.), as well as, a message of God protecting and providing for God's people when life hurts and / or is scary. It was pointed out that the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm has been a source of strength and support for Jews and Christians alike for almost 3,000 years. As the author shared in the sermon:

It boggles the mind to think about how many people have read, sung, and shared this Psalm in that many years. And I think that it is a comfort when we share it at our own times of grief and hurt. Because it is at those times that we can feel disconnected and alone. In this Psalm we are connected to a 3,000 year old family and also to God, sharing a very basic but needed message: 'we are not alone'.<sup>10</sup>

The author concluded the first part by stating that the congregation should know, deep within their beings, that where ever they found themselves, they will not be alone either. That is the first part, the comforting part of the Psalm. Then there is the barb.

'The barb' is that lesson from the Psalm (or any passage) that a reader or listener might infer to speak radically to the individual's life. In the case of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, one focus of a barb could come from the the frequently cited fourth verse:

Even though I walk  
through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.<sup>11</sup>

The challenge is how does the empowered Christian community carry on God's work as illustrated above – namely to be present with others as they “walk through the valley of

---

<sup>10</sup>Matthew Zuehlke, “The Lord is My Shepherd,” (Sermon, Wilmington Friends Meeting, Wilmington, OH, July 19, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Ps 23:4.

the shadow of death”. Often this is read in a personal manner: “God is with me”.

However, if the Christian community is called upon to bring about the Kingdom of God<sup>12</sup> by being the hands and feet of Christ for we are “the body of Christ, and each one of [of us] is a part of it”,<sup>13</sup> then it stands to reason that this could be redirected to infer that we should also help those who are walking through the valley of the shadow. This is a time for the Christian community to join together and support one another so those that mourners do not feel isolated and alone. It is hoped that this image might encourage unity within the congregation in times of hardship. The community that gathers for a funeral is a powerful one when it has unity; a power rarely found within the confines of normal worship.<sup>14</sup> The participants are united by a common grief and a common reliance upon each other and upon God. Certainly the Church should know that it is not alone; but so too should the Church make sure others know this, as well.

The call for the congregation to support those who are hurting emotionally was echoed in the next sermon on the 13<sup>th</sup> Psalm. This sermon looked at the very common question: “Where were you?” This question is hard enough to ask when one is speaking to a family member, a spouse or friends. It can be particularly difficult when this question is posed to one's faith community. Yet, this is important for the project and the congregation's spiritual growth, because this combined question-emotion is one often felt by those that mourn. It is the inward nature of the lament in scripture. One has to ponder, looking at the frequency of laments in scripture (particularly the Hebrew Scriptures), that perhaps God wants to hear the peoples' anger, hurts, and frustrations. Again, echoing the

---

<sup>12</sup> Lk 9:2.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Cor 12:27.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Hoffacker, *A Matter of Life and Death: Preaching at Funerals* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2002), 28.



sermon on holiday blues, this Psalm, and all laments, the author reaffirmed that it is okay to scream and cry to God. Readers of the Christian Testament will remember that Christ himself cried and screamed to God. Why should the congregation assume that their spiritual lives are any different? This acceptance of people's emotions certainly does coincide with the image of a loving, parental deity. Certainly God can handle the people's emotions. Hopefully, God's congregation can do so, as well.

It is important for the congregation to come to grips with this emotional question of alienation so that they might begin to understand that it is through their ministry that this concern can be alleviated. Certainly God did not forget the Psalmist, nor did God hide God's face, even though it felt like it.<sup>15</sup> By being present in people's lives, especially during funerals, the congregation can answer that call (or perhaps even prevent!) of “where were you?” by also not hiding their collective faces. More than just looking at the lament as something people do when life hurts, it was a call out to God. This also is an important facet of the congregation's ministry – that it is called to be there, close at hand, but that God goes the rest of the way. While the 13<sup>th</sup> Psalm begins as a lament, it ends in praise (as many laments do), acknowledging: “I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me.”<sup>16</sup> It is hoped that the congregation can be part of that good.

To a lesser amount, the theme of responsibility of the community, as well as, the individual was raised again a week later in a sermon on Psalm 51. This psalm, according to the subscript, was: “When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.”<sup>17</sup> This Psalm and sermon centered on the theme of asking for

---

<sup>15</sup> Ps 13:1.

<sup>16</sup> Ps 13:6.

<sup>17</sup> Ps 51:subscript.

forgiveness for hurting other people (in David's case it was Bathsheba and Uriah). It certainly was not David's blemish-free record that earned him the recognition down through the centuries as “a man after God's own heart”.<sup>18</sup> What seems much more likely taken from the Psalm as well as other stories, was that David found favor by being honest, admitting to God when he sinned. This is important in the growth of the congregation as a loving entity, because in this process there are bound to be mistakes. This is certainly the case when dealing with funerals, because the process is limited by time (i.e. it is very hard to 'redo' a funeral) and often compounded by strong emotions. In this sermon, the author also noted that it is unfortunate that in the current American culture, perfection is seen as standard. The best is what is expected. “Gone are the days when students could be proud of passing – now you have to get an 'A'”.<sup>19</sup> There are times when the congregation, or its representatives, will fail to live up to the need of others who are mourning. The author certainly understands and acknowledges his own mistakes and oversights in the time of funerals. The congregation (any congregation) needs to be honest also about its faults, both past and present. This way, the people can reflect and improve in their ministry in the future.

The Psalm series concluded with a sermon on number 133. This poetic Psalm speaks about two liquids: an oil of anointing and the dew of Hermon.<sup>20</sup> It was shared that these images can be seen as citations of abundance and life, respectively. The oil was likely the costly oil of anointing, and in order to have it cascade down the beard and onto the collar of a robe, one would have to pour a sizable amount. This extreme usage would

---

<sup>18</sup> Acts 13:22.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew Zuehlke, “Have Mercy on Me, O God,” (Sermon, Wilmington Friends Meeting, Wilmington, OH, August 2, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Ps 133:2 and Ps 133:3, respectively.

require either abundance or a detachment from cost. Either way, the act of giving is seen as superior to that of monetary value. The dews of Hermon are citing the northern source for the waters of the Jordan River that sustains the Jordan Valley region. In the arid region of Palestine, these 'dews of Hermon' are not simply a nice pastoral scene but rather very real, life-giving waters for the countryside. Combined, these two liquids tell something of how the individual and the community is to be. The Psalm begins by stating: "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!"<sup>21</sup> So, the nature of the liquids, in this three verse Psalm, tell us about God's people living in unity. It is the author's belief that part of the way this instruction comes from the oil and the water is in liquid's ability to flow. That is to say that falling liquid will always find a way forward. Liquids running down hill will jog left and right it will move around little obstacles just so they will be able to continue on their path. If something comes in front of falling liquid, something that is so big that it can not go around it, the liquid will pool there until it can rise above it. Now, turning this thought over to the work of unity and peace within the ministry of the congregation, little obstacles should not be allowed to block the work. If the congregation has a family or individual faced with mourning, the congregation should be able to flow around said obstacles rather than let them block anything life-giving or full of abundance. At times, the congregation will need to take a different route than the most direct, but what matters is working towards unity. Lastly, like the liquid, if a congregation member is ever concerned that something will occur that is too big for the individual, like facing the death of a loved one, it can be surmounted by allowing the

---

<sup>21</sup> Ps 133:1.

liquid (i.e. congregation) to pool together and overwhelm that barrier – to overwhelm it with kindness and love. The author left the sermon with the simple question: “How well are we flowing with unity today?”

It is hoped that these sermons, combined with others, increased the awareness of the congregation for its call to be a place of support and community. This process worked towards changing the view from that of hired clergy only performing these roles to such a place that the ministry of charity and concern is shared by everyone. Sermons, such as those based on the Psalms, are likely effective in encouraging this mindset in that they, as presented at this time, encourage action (being present is an action) that is doing the right thing rather than focusing on speech (saying the right thing). This is a proper distinction since, for those who are not trained grief counselors or therapists, improper words of counsel can impede grief. However, it requires truly unique situations for presence and unity to be so hindering.

### **Workshop**

The project culminated on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009 as the author held a workshop on the congregation's response for interested individuals. The workshop, entitled “Out Part in Grief”, started with introductions and a beginning orientation to the day's process. Thirteen individuals attended this workshop. It is interesting to note, however, that thirteen individuals did not sign up for the workshop – only two did. Even though announcements and bulletin inserts for the congregation predated the workshop by six weeks, very few chose to sign up.

Faced with the prospect that the workshop would either have to be canceled or be too poorly attended to provide enough experiences, the author contacted a number of individuals from the congregation who had expressed interest in the project. Of those twenty additional individuals contacted, eight came to the workshop. The workshop was also attended by three individuals from neighboring Quaker congregations. It is important to note this occurrence to bring further evidence to bear that people in this culture can find speaking on death, grieving, and responsibility to be so challenging that it appears many would choose to look the other way. Faced with both the open call to the workshop as well as a active invite, it was also very interesting to see who participated as shall be shown.

The first interaction with the workshop attenders was to administer a pre-workshop questionnaire (see Appendix C). In the questionnaire many noteworthy things were shown in the attendees' backgrounds. The first interesting statistic that came from the questionnaire was the fact that the workshop was attended by a far greater percentage of women than men (76.9% vs 23.1% respectively). The percentage of women over men who attended the workshop is in greater proportion that the approximate 60% - 40% normally present in the congregation. This fact begs the question of why so many more women than men attended the workshop faced with a different ratio of gender within the congregation. Perhaps the difference in attendance demonstrates a cultural norm that somehow women are given more permission to grieve and mourn than men. Certainly men have been historically and systematically encouraged to ignore or at least downplay their emotions.<sup>22</sup> This is not a system that is contained entirely within the male subset of

---

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Levang, *When Men Grieve: Why Men Grieve Differently and How You Can Help* (Minneapolis, MN: Fairview Press, 1990), 15-16.

the culture, but it is promoted within both genders. Recent years have seen this shift slightly away from these tendencies, but certainly there is more work to be done. Since the experience is universal, men are just as likely to experience grief as women.

Also, the workshop was attended by more individuals who could be called seniors (66 years or more) representing 46.1%. If the age is dropped to 56 years or older, the percentage raises to 69.2%. Only 15.4% attended were younger than 36 years or were between 36 and 55 years. Both of these individuals were expressly invited by the workshop convener, leaving the real possibility that without intervention the workshop would have been attended only by seniors. Much like the issue of gender, the aged nature of attendees would mirror cultural tendencies to see elders are more likely to deal with the process of funerals than the younger individuals. This brings to mind past societies where the younger people are busy hunting and gathering, and the elders deal with care of the village including death rituals. Written into the modern world, it would seem reasonable to expect that the young to be involved in external events rather than the internal, such as funeral rites and rituals.

Those who attended were evenly split in spiritual background between general Protestant and Quaker, save one individual who came from a Catholic background. Attendees were largely of the spiritually consistent. That is to say, these individuals tended to be both active in worship and in their own spiritual disciplines. The majority of attendees worship more than 3 times a month (69.2%) and even more state that they pray daily (76.9%). These statistics certainly are not surprising since both figures illustrate that the majority of individuals at the workshop are those who have already made a strong commitment to worship and spiritual discipline. While it is hoped that in time more than just such committed people will join together in the congregation for the ministry of

funerary rites, it is certainly plausible that any policy of ministry change has to start with a core group. This core group, in the case of mourning ministry is a sub-church within the larger, whole church.

In the matter of funerals and the congregation's involvement, the pre-questionnaire also provided some noteworthy data, as well as, providing a basis from which to judge the content and presentation of the workshop. A strong majority of those polled state that the funeral most belongs to the bereaved (76.9%) rather than the deceased (7.7%) or the community (15.4%). This question on the questionnaire was a partial trick question in that the eventual nature of the workshop will illustrate that the funeral, in fact, belongs to all the people of the church. There is a connected, unasked question, as to who the service might be for, yet the semantics between a funeral 'being for' and 'belonging to' are largely tangential to the aims of this project. However, as the question stands, the question shows that many felt that the services belong to someone other than the community. The strong preference for this gathered group was that the services most belong to the bereaved. This will certainly show in other figures as specifics are analyzed.

One interesting quality that became evident was that the majority of those at the workshop said they had attended twenty or more funerals in their lives. No one, even the youngest members, stated that they had attended less than ten. However, 23.1% said that they have not attended any funerals yet this year. An additional 53.8% said they have attended 3 or less. So, on the whole, the group said that they are very experienced in funerals, but they have not had the opportunity to (i.e. no one died) or did not choose to attend any funerals so far this year. Certainly the former is possible and likely should be given precedence. However, the latter is an interesting possibility. It is possible that, due

to some additional environmental stressors, or combination of such ( e.g. economy, politics, religious concerns), individuals from this local area of Friends have felt less likely to fellowship through the rites of the funeral at this time. If this is even slightly possible, this could reaffirm the need for congregational emphasis of the ministry of presence at funerals. For, without such an emphasis, those who need additional help in times of cultural stress, namely those who have all of the normal concerns with the addition of losing a loved one, could be those who are less likely to receive such care. An individual should “never underestimate the value of your presence . . . your presence . . . can make a great difference.”<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, this potential relationship was not discovered until after the workshop and will have to be pursued at a future time.

A very interesting point and counter point was between whether attendees had shared their funeral wishes with their family of origin versus sharing with their spiritual family. A strong majority (69.4%) of those at the workshop stated that they have spoken to their families about their funeral wishes, but in contrast a paltry 7.7% (one person) had spoken to someone official in the individual's worshiping community to let them know that individual's funeral wishes. This disparity hints that, while a majority have thought of the issue of their own funerals and shared that information with their families, those conversations do not, on average, transfer over to the individual's spiritual family. While the Church-universal often speaks about being a spiritual family and support network to its members, in this statistic there is one area that, for whatever the reason, the church's spiritual family is lagging behind the individuals' family of origin. The question at that point is whether this is due either to the individual's comfort or thought process or rather

---

<sup>23</sup> Lynda D. Elliott, *The Counsel of a Friends: 12 Ways to Put your Caring Heart into Action* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 11.



the leadership within the congregational to facilitate and handle these conversations. There is also the question that perhaps, the individuals do not feel as emotionally bounded to the denomination as might otherwise believed. Given that over half of the attendees had another denomination as their faith of origin, one can not ignore the question of whether or not the fact that they are attending a different denomination now hints at a personal spiritual struggle which, in turn, could impede the individual's comfort with speaking on their or their loved one's deaths. There is an additional factor that brings weight to the low percentage of those who share their wishes with their spiritual families. Namely that families are finding themselves separated by greater distances, geopolitically as well as frequently spiritually and mentally. Faced with a certain level of alienation from those our society have traditionally viewed as supportive, it can not be surprising that the modern individual also feels alienated from the local church; seeing it as somehow even less connected to them than their families. This concern centers on the importance of this issue and perhaps the betterment of the exposure in the church. To be an ideal answer to this condition, the congregation can be immediately present at the time of loss. Also, it would seem reasonable to expect that this will be more frequent in the future and the local congregation could be the first to respond and coordinate the funeral rites in the case of an individual's death.

Giving the propensity to not share with a spiritual family, it is not as surprising then to look at the percentages for how attendees viewed their responsibility to attend funerals. A majority (53.8%) of those surveyed either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they would prefer to attend calling hours at a funeral home rather than attend a funeral proper. One more (7.7%) was undecided. While this might not be surprising, it is rather disturbing. The Meetinghouse or church is arguably seen often as the spiritual center of

the congregation's life. It is certainly the primary location for the rites of rituals of the Christian church – and yet here is a rite where otherwise spiritually committed individuals would prefer a location of business over their place of worship. A strong minority (38.5%) stated that they would rather not attend calling hours.<sup>24</sup> This has the unfortunate implication that even among these strongly spiritual group in attendance, a fair percentage would choose a situation where they do not have to worship (i.e. calling hours at a funeral home) than to participate in a worshipful funerary rite. It is likely that this percentage would continue with the less spirituality active group; if anything this percentage would likely increase. As such, it appears that workshops such as the one in question are required to increase the likelihood of congregational members of attending funerary rites. This is exacerbated in that, while most of those in attendance (76.8%) said that they were not likely to make an excuse rather than attend a funeral, two individuals said that they would (15.4%), and one was unsure. Of the three latter individuals, two of them were those under 35 years. There is a reasonable expectation that this ratio would continue (or perhaps strengthen) in the general population.

When the questionnaire focused on whose funerals the workshop participants would attend, a very interesting series of ratios became apparent. When the questions inquired about funeral services for those that individuals are close to (e.g. family members or members of the individuals' faith community), everyone at the workshop either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they would be in attendance at said services. Yet, the numbers began to drop off the further away from this core one goes. Both funerals for congregation member's families, attendee's families, and members of the community drop

---

<sup>24</sup>Those who said that they either 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' that they would rather calling hours than funerals of course does not preclude the possibility to attend both.

from 100% attendance to a stark 46.1% likely to attend.<sup>25 26</sup> An additional 46.1% of participants were unsure and one actively disagreed that they would attend in cases where the funeral services are for those only connected to their lives. It is the downward trend as the focus moves further away from an individual's family of origin that is of particular concern. While familial interrelationship within certain congregations can be present, even in the most interrelated congregation there is frequently some individual (or group of individuals) within the congregation that another individual (or group of individuals) are not familial related. As such, without a strong community compassion at such times as loss, those forces that keep these different groups united are of paramount importance.

It is important to remember that in the Society of Friends, as well as, most Protestant denominations, there is the strong teaching of the universal priesthood – the thought that there is a shared ministry among the people of the congregation. Yet, in the funeral services, the workshop attendees also made note on their pre-questionnaires that many (38.5%) felt that they were not responsible for the quality of the funerals that happened within their spiritual family. A matching number were unsure if they were responsible. Only a minority (23.1%) felt that they might be responsible. No one 'strongly agreed' that they were responsible for the quality of the funerals at their place of worship. What is particularly interesting about this figure is that among those in attendance, a strong minority are sitting members of their congregation's Ministry and Counsel

---

<sup>25</sup>It is interesting to note that while in all of these cases (i.e. congregation member's families, attendee's families, and members of the community) the average is the same in approving attendance at funerals. For those in community, the support appears to be slightly stronger in that one person marked 'strongly agree' rather than just the 'agree' of the other two circumstances, hence giving a slight nudge to those who are attending services for those in the community.

<sup>26</sup>The 100% attendance here is representative of the 69.2% who stated that they would 'strongly agree' and the 30.7% who 'agreed' to attend a funeral for a family member, as well as, the 30.7% who 'strongly agreed' and the 69.2% who 'agreed' to attend the funeral of the congregation member. In either of these cases no one marked that they were 'unsure', 'disagreed', or 'strongly disagreed'.

Committee, the Quaker Meeting's board of elders who are charged with the oversight of the pastoral care and condition of the congregation. A further percentage (23%) of those in attendance are active in another leadership committee of the congregation (e.g. Trustees, Stewardship & Finance, Peace & Social Concerns). Only a comparably small group (23%) are not actively involved in the named leadership of their congregations.<sup>27</sup> This would seem to raise the question about how much the leadership of the congregation see their positions as giving real help to those in need with this question of if they are responsible for the funerary rites of their congregation. Perhaps it comes as no surprise then that the majority of funerals for the attendees have occurred at funeral homes rather than at places of worship (69.2% vs 30.7%). These combined statistics have frightening implications for how our congregation's leaders visualize both their call to ministry, as well as, the focus of their place of worship.

The workshop spoke about the concept of grief and how it can be processed. Grief is a simple word, but it is not quite so simple to define. It is the emotional response to a loss.<sup>28</sup> It spans the emotions of numbness, disbelief, anxiety, in addition to the commonly held feelings of sadness and despair. Certainly as a subject, grief is too large to cover in one workshop. So, rather than focusing, like much of current writings, on the acute grief of the individual, this intensive focused instead on how the congregation can aid the grief

---

<sup>27</sup> Although in all cases of those who are not serving the congregation currently, all have been on named committees in the past, with one exception.

<sup>28</sup> James L. Killen, Jr., *Pastoral Care in the Small Membership Church* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2005), 47.

process for others. This way, the congregation might begin to see grief, not just in individual terms, but as an occurrence for community bonding. The treatment for this is sympathy, or “feeling with” those in the midst of grief.<sup>29</sup>

It is important to note, as was shared at the workshop, that loss is universal. It is a subject that everyone will confront eventually. As mortals and relatives of mortals, all of humanity is going to experience loss. As such, grief in any community is inevitable. This holds two implications for the church. Firstly, grief is an incredible field for care and missions. Compared to any other focused mission, such as single parents, seniors, released felons, etc., a mission to the grieving will reach across all subgroups. The challenge, second, is the incredible need to do this ministry well. The thought is that if our spiritual communities do a good job with those in grief, we can provide healing for our community and the individuals therein.

In the workshop, it was shared that grief is a complex situation. As one participant noted on a post-questionnaire “everyone grieves in their own way.” However, with this, there are some generalities that can be drawn from the experience of grief and loss. Grief is helped by: previous experience, time, lack of other stress, and support / community. In contrast, then, grief is exacerbated by inexperience, forced (accelerated) grieving, compound stress, and isolation. Those in leadership of local congregations often hear from the congregation and community at a time of loss, “What can I do?” Perhaps for the congregation, the question “What can we do?” is more appropriate. Faced with the stated natures of grief, the local congregation can do much for the area of time. Time is still one nature that humanity can not influence.

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Note: it is important to see sympathetic presence as a treatment rather than a cure, for a treatment elicits the image of continuing care which is what grief often requires. The idea of cure alludes to an immediate and instantaneous fix, which does not happen in grieving situations. Time is always required.

Many often feel that the local congregation can most help with stress relief. Many feel strongly that they should provide meals or child care in the midst of grief. However, the local congregation can only do a little for external sources of stress. They can work with the stress – trying to care for the needs as they present themselves. However, ministry in this way can be problematic. To begin with, those who are in grief, particularly acute or recent, might not be able to vocalize their needs due to the overwhelming nature of her / his change in station. As such, a barrage of individuals coming to the grieving individual asking her / him to “tell me what you need” can actually encourage that person's anxiety and frustration. There are limited ways in which a congregation might help in the areas, such as watching / care-giving for children for a parent who lost her / his partner, but these occurrences are specific and limited in scope. There is also, unfortunately, the very real question of scope when speaking of giving care to the grieving. That is to say, most would clearly try to care for active members of the congregation, but are we as quick to help those whose attendance has lapsed? How about a person in the community? How about a stranger? It is unfortunate that in light of Christ's instruction to treat our neighbors,<sup>30</sup> that as the grieving individual's situation moves further and further away from the congregation's routine experience, the want to meet the individual's needs decreases within the congregation. However, even in the case where the congregation wants to serve those outside of its walls, there can be a very real question as to scope; that is how, where, and when the church might be able to afford helping the grieving individual. This is especially true in the case where financial

---

<sup>30</sup> “One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?' 'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. . . . The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.'" (Mk 12:28-29). This passage is echoed again in Leviticus 19:18 and Matthew 22:34-40. The concept comes up again in the Story of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37).

concerns, as meeting the needs for all that grieve in the community, can become too expensive and time consuming for many congregation. Even faced with a clear understanding of who the local congregation might help, the question can then be raised as to how long is the individual given aid. Pragmatically, is there a dollar or time limit set for each instance of care – which can give the feeling of uncaring or unjust; or is it taken as a case by case basis – which then becomes very time consuming. This is not to say that the local congregation can not help in those areas, but rather that help in these areas can (often) be problematic.

Moreover, it was shared that a congregation can help in a limited context with experience in that the more it encourages its members / attenders to attend the funerary rites for others then the more such experience the congregants will receive. The major problem in helping in this manner is that its aid can not be given immediately, but rather it requires time for more funerals to happen before a given individual can receive the benefit from these experiences. Experience is one of those places where the test comes first and then the study.

Clearly, contrary to many commonly held beliefs, it is only in the realm of community vs. isolation that the congregation can clearly meet the needs of the grieving. This is the realm of grief care where any congregation can serve that is not dependent on the griever's ability to voice her / his needs, the congregation's financial status, or previous experience. It takes very little training for congregants to attend services and be a helpful presence. A helpful presence would be when a member of the congregation can be available throughout the services (i.e. coming early and leaving late), not bring excess, personal baggage to the situation (e.g. “when my father died, I cried for three days”), and not try to fix or solve the person's grief. A helpful presence is simply a presence, available

when needed, but not requiring any additional labors of the part of the mourner. This time is both full and challenging enough without adding more. Most adult individuals have experienced the antithesis of a helpful presence at some point in their lives and as such can extrapolate what not to do.

Scope, that is when and whose funerals to attend, also should rarely be an issue in most congregations. The only place where this might be an issue are those rare times when the congregation is faced with a large number of funerals in a short time, such as a local natural disaster or traumatic event. However, in these cases, perhaps it is especially important that the congregation tries to be a presence in the community. This is not to say that community presence is the only answer, but rather that it is a reasonable answer for the majority of congregations, independent of their size.

In the workshop, the nature of funerals and public grieving in the Scriptures was also noted. In the Scriptures death is a constant, and often spoken of in very positive terms. Bringing the breadth and depth of the Scriptures' voice on funerals appeared to have an affect on the participants of the workshop. As one participant noted: "I never thought about how many times [funerals] are mentioned in the Bible."

A substantial portion of the of the workshop involved sharing four stories of death. It was hoped that these stories would help to give attendees some frame work by which to handle some of the content of the workshop. Three of these stories focused on problems of grief and the community's attendance. One was a case of a fully actualized funeral. All of these stories are based on a variety of real stories that were shared with the author who has changed the detail to protect identities or to streamline their sharing. The stories began with Suzanne's loss:



Suzanne was a Christian and felt that to be honest to her faith, she should attend worship consistently. She was a strong attender and an active member of the congregation. She was known as a prayer warrior and a willing companion to any who needed a shoulder. This started to change when her adult daughter contracted terminal cancer when she was forty years old. Suzanne was sixty. The daughter, with doctoral support, attempted a series of treatments. Eventually all of these failed and the daughter was entered into hospice care. During this time, her congregation's pastor visited frequently. However, only one of the members of the congregation came to visit. The daughter died six months later. Again, the pastor took care of the daughter's memorial / funeral for the deceased and again, only one member of the congregation came.

After the memorial, Suzanne found that she was not only grieving the loss of her daughter but was also angry at her home congregation. She felt that she had ministered with them; but when it was her time to be ministered to her, church had failed her. She expressed to her then pastor that she saw him as required to be there as a professional but that no one else chose to be with her. Her attendance at worship at this time began to decrease. The pastor spoke with her and after their conversation, Suzanne began to see the church as her cross to bear. She agreed to begin attending again and try to forgive them for their oversight in her care. Her pastor left for another appointment. Four pastoral teams later, Suzanne was now in her late seventies. It is at this time that she shared her story with the author. She stated that she is still dealing with her feelings of abandonment by the church over a decade earlier.

The story ended at that point for the workshop. However, there is an addendum to Suzanne's case. The primary person on which this conglomerate story is based, now in her late seventies, fell under a strong infection that kept her house bound for many weeks as her medication weakened her greatly. Her new pastor kept in contact with her throughout this time. In the middle of this time, she confided that this experience was bringing back her experiences of abandonment in the loss of her daughter. She began to wonder again, if she made the right choice by returning to worship with the group that

failed to care for her before. It becomes painfully obvious that while the pastor was present for this individual, due to the conduct of the congregation she still feels distanced from her spiritual family.

With the established emphasis on both healing and care-giving, 'Suzanne' provides a powerful image for what happens when the congregation fails to share this care. The shared story combined with the subsequent pastoral knowledge clearly illustrates that the individual received a pastoral presence by trained clergy throughout her combined experiences. Certainly it could be argued that she might not have received enough care. What is much harder to argue for is if she received enough contact from the congregation. Having only one person in attendance at her grown child's funeral likely encouraged the belief that 'Suzanne's' congregation did not truly care for her (or her family's condition). As a direct result of this missed ministry, this individual believes that there is distance between herself and her congregation. It is important to note that according to current models of human emotions, anger is a secondary emotion.<sup>31</sup> That is to say that anger is an emotion caused by another emotion, such as feelings of hurt, isolation, or frustration. In a congregation, or any group of people, one individual's secondary emotion (e.g. anger) can be caused by another individual's secondary emotion (also anger) which is, in turn, caused by a primary feeling of fear by said individual. In such a case, the originating individual's emotional hurt results in an emotional reaction of others within the person's community. Thus, a wound caused by, for example a poorly attended ritual as in Suzanne's case, can radiate out into the congregation having a much greater effect on the congregation and / or surrounding community. Luckily in Suzanne's case, the sphere of

---

<sup>31</sup> Leroy Howe, *Angry People in the Pews: Managing Anger in the Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2001), 38-39.

influence was kept minimal. It was likely only because the individual chose to see the congregation as her ministry – trying to bring Christ to them – that she ever returned to the congregation. To hope and rely on the possibility that all those in congregations' are mourners who are as dutiful to their Christian duty would easily seem to be a dangerous supposition. With such a supposition, there is certainly cause to wonder as to the number of families the Christian Church universal has lost in the United States each year. If only there was a stronger presence by the congregation, then this distancing would never need to have happened. Certainly this would give credit to the idea that a congregational, lay-based response to the ministry of presence in mourning would help minimize resulting congregational losses.

The second story that was shared was of John.

When the author met John, he was in his seventies. He was a jovial man who was an elder of the congregation. By all appearances, John appeared to be an ideal congregant. However, John shared with the author a story from his childhood that greatly affected his spiritual life. When John was seven, his grandmother died. He was reasonably close to the deceased, but she was certainly not a primary caregiver. In the process of her funeral, John and his cousins were often instructed to go outside and play rather than be with the family. At the funeral proper, he remembers the children of the family being left at home while the adults went to the funeral home for the viewing. Also, when the congregation gathered for the deceased memorial, again the children were kept in the nursery for play time rather than being included in the process.

John vividly remembers sixty years later feeling that if he was not welcome at his own grandmother's funeral in his church, then maybe his church does not need him. As soon as his parents let him make his own choices for worship, John stopped attending. For the next ten years, John went his own direction from the church. He only started to attend again after marrying his wife when he was twenty-five. He chose his wife's church.

He raised his family in that congregation and is still an active member there, however he still remembers the experiences of isolation as a child. This story helped participants grapple with the participation of children in funerary rites. There is often the unwritten thought that funeral rites are an adult-only event, because children and often youth can not full comprehend the events as they are unfolding. This is a dangerous course of logic. First, this is dangerous because it assume that the adults themselves understand the unfolding of events. It has been firmly established that many who are grieving are not fully present in the times immediately following the loss of a loved one. This lack of full comprehension hints at the need of ritual in the process, a nature that was focused more in detail later in the workshop. However, just to exclude any individual that lacks complete comprehension establishes a dangerous precedent. Under such a circumstance, then many senior relatives of deceased individuals, as well as, others who are wrestling with cognitive and memory functions should be excluded since they might not be able to fully understand events. If religious services only welcomed those who could fully comprehend the events, this would greatly limit participation. Moreover, comprehension is not the goal of memorial rites, but rather to encourage the grieving process. Young people, such as children and youth, are also grieving their loss of parent, family member, Sunday School teacher, or friend. Often, because these individuals are immature compared to adults, children will not grieve in a sustained manner as adults do.<sup>32</sup> As such, children will often need to be encouraged to grieve by the adults of their community, such as at a funeral.<sup>33</sup> As part of the congregation, these young people

---

<sup>32</sup> *Comforting Children in Crisis* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, Inc, 2009), 48.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

deserve to grieve and mourn with the rest of the gathered congregation. Christ illustrated the inclusion of children in the life of the faith community in the Gospel of Matthew:

Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.<sup>34</sup>

With such a statement from Christianity's Teacher and Lord, it is hard to see clearly why children should be excluded from such community functions.

John's story also hints that children and youth are often watching social events with an eye to greater issues than what is unfolding at that moment. In this case, John's participation, or lack thereof, helped John to understand his place, or lack thereof, in the sub-culture of the church. It is unfortunate the number of young people who have felt forced out of their home congregations because as youth they were told by adults' actions that there is no place for them.

The presenter also shared a micro-story of a burial of cremains (i.e. the cremated remains) where grandchildren were present with the rest of the family. One of the younger children, looking at the small box, asked which part of his deceased relative was in the vessel. While this observation is humorous, it also hints at the very concrete nature within children. Children are trying to understand the world around them and as such have many questions. Funerary rites, such as funerals and graveside services, give children an event to encourage questions about life and death. If the adults in the

---

<sup>34</sup> Mt 19:13-15.

congregation do not allow and even encourage a child's participation, the child quite likely will suffer from a stunting of knowledge in this area and perpetuate the fear of death in our culture.<sup>35</sup>

Richard's story was the third shared:

Richard was also an elder in his community. When he was diagnosed with a terminal cancer, he had retired from teaching ten years prior. Richard had been a teacher for the community high school for thirty years. Faced with his prognosis, Richard quietly entered hospice care. He was visited at this time by the hospice chaplain and his own pastor. Eventually Richard died. His widow understood that it was his wishes not to have a memorial or public funeral. In keeping with this, Richard was quietly interred at a graveside service attended by only his widow and adult child.

The problems arose shortly after when Richard's obituary was printed in the local paper. Letters to the editor of Richard's grown students spoke about how they had missed saying goodbye to their beloved teacher. A number of public figures also spoke to the pastor that they too wished that there had been a public service that they could have attended. Many of these discussions in person or in print spoke about the lack of closure surrounding Richard's death.

Richard's story is perhaps the most challenging of the three thus far. On its face, the story upholds everything that is commonly held in funerals. The individual reflects on a pending death rationally and makes a personal choice as to his funerary rites. The family, aware of this preference, upholds the decision and does not enter into a public funeral ritual. Certainly, at least in the author's experience, a sizable minority in our current culture choose to not hold public services and a percentage of those choose to have no services at all. If this is what the deceased wished, where is the harm?

---

<sup>35</sup> There are many resources to help children be active participants in funerals. One excellent example is the activity book *Help Me Say Goodbye: Activities for Helping Kids Cope When a Special Person Dies* [Janis Silverman, *Help me Say Goodbye: Activities for Helping Kids Cope When a Special Person Dies* (Minneapolis, MN: Fairview Press, 1999)]. What is uncommonly refreshing about this work is that it can speak unilaterally to a young person's loss. The focus is on a special person rather than the specific loss of a parent, sibling, or friends. The author encourages congregations to have a copy of this resource available to their community.

The harm is to the community, as Richard's story clearly illustrates. Richard and his family failed to understand that basic nature that we are communal creatures. This is remarked in a classic folk hymn “No man is an island, no man stands alone / Each man's joy is joy to me / Each man's grief is my own.”<sup>36</sup> While it is true that humans have individual free will, certainly for the Christian this is tempered with the concepts of Christian duty and mercy. One is not normally considered blameless if her / his choice results in the pain or frustrations of another. While it might seem radical to move this interpretation over to the need for funerals within the Christian community, we are reminded that our Lord and teacher Christ was and is still a radical also. Being frank with the nature of our lives and the likelihood that our lives might have touched another, it is necessary to see that we will leave behind those who will need to mourn our loss. Certainly in Richard's story, we have an individual who touched a number of lives in his time as teacher. To be merciful to those individuals is to give them a hospitable and welcoming community with which to share their emotions. This should not to be seen as a justification for lavish funerals, but only as a requirement for funeral rites to be performed for the community health.

The last story was of Ruth:

While Ruth was a retired minister and leader of the church, she had been in nursing care for an extended time. At her passing, her memorial service was offered in the place of worship of her children where Ruth has been tentatively connected for a few years during her nursing care. A fair number of congregation turned out of the service. Together with the local family Ruth was memorialized in worship and her life was reflected in a homily. The memorial was marked throughout by singing and

---

<sup>36</sup>Karl Bach and others, *Songs of the Spirit* (Philadelphia, PA: Friends General Conference Press, 1978), 20.

remembrances. When the family came to the year anniversary of Ruth's death, they stated that while they missed her presence in life, they felt that she had been given a proper send off to God.

Ruth's story is of course the story of the fully realized funeral, the time when congregation and family unite together in mourning and remembering. It is the time to be in community with one another for joint memory and joint support. Ruth's story also marks a very important aspect of many funerary rites: music. Music's importance in service should not be overlooked. Music has the ability to speak to people beyond time and location as compared to that of homilies and messages. As Hudson remarks, "The selection of music is almost as important as the selection of a scriptural text when one is planning meaningful worship for a hurting congregation."<sup>37</sup> The ability for music to remind those who hurt of God's love and care is not to be lightly overlooked. Music has an ability to speak to memory that is special and unique. As many professional ministers have discovered, their flock might not remember a sermon for more than a few days, but the music of worship can be remembered for years. This nature itself can have a calming and unifying affect on the gathered congregation at a memorial or funeral.

Music also helps to establish the funeral as a time of worship under the Christian Church. This is due to the fact that with music, along with other events such as a homily and public prayer, the funeral service mimics much of the same outward behaviors that the congregation would experience in its normal time of meeting for worship. Encouraging this feeling can only be beneficial by helping participants to see that death and loss are part of the broader life of the congregation rather than a separate and overly

---

<sup>37</sup>Jill M. Hudson, *Congregational Trauma: Caring, Coping, & Learning* (n.p.: The Alban Institute, 1998), 96.



traumatic event (notice here the different between traumatic and mournful). To have funerals woven into the broader tapestry of worship helps participants and grieving individuals to feel a part of the Church rather than isolated in their station.

More than this, music in the form of congregational singing serves as a permission-giving event. In the Quaker memorial service, as well as others, where participants are often asked to publicly reflect on the life of the deceased, shared music can help participants to feel more comfortable in sharing later. The individual has already stood once and shared (in song) so subsequent standing and sharing (in voice) is easier. Moreover, for those who do not or can not stand and share in the vocal ministry of remembering, having a shared time of music can give these individuals a feeling as to having done something themselves in the service. Rather than feeling that they need to come up with their own words, these individuals can rest on the words of the shared hymn. This can be especially valuable for those in attendance who might have issues in speaking due to infirmity or cognitive dissonance.

As a whole, these stories had a marked affect on the attendees. It is after hearing these story compilations that the attendees began to share some of their own stories. One of the attendees reiterated a story of a friend and widower who, twenty-five years after his wife's death, remembers who went to his wife's funeral and spoke of being thankful for their presence. Another individual remarked that she remembered those who ministered to her husband in his last days and in turn wished that there was more ministering to her and her family throughout the funeral practice. As a whole, most individuals present remarked favorably to the stories in either voice or in physical mannerism (e.g. head nodding, sitting forward, etc.).

On a contrary note, one participant noted that his experience of congregational support was less than helpful. In this person's case, with a parent's death in another part of the country, the individual felt that the subsequent public mass where many locals attended took on "circus-like" qualities. As a result, the individual believes that at any subsequent funeral, only those who "really love him" should be in attendance. Certainly as one experience out of thirteen, this personal sharing should not be seen as grounds to dismiss the project. Rather, this response is an interesting set of information that bears some reflection. To begin with, the individual implies in this comment that the funeral rite, in some manner, is held of personal value. If it was a without value then it would seem unlikely to elicit such a negative response after the fact. To probe even further into the issues raised, the individual's statement of those who "really loved" a deceased individual, hints that the individual might have felt more alienated from the experience and those joining together in the ritual of the funeral mass. This supposition is supported by the fact that, according to the individual's pre-questionnaire the family of origin was also Roman Catholic, and yet as an adult the individual chose to worship with a denomination without any outward sacraments (Quakers). To push on the idea of those who loved a person attending service could be seen as giving support to a closely bonded and loving congregation to being present at such a funeral rite.

Given a beginning concept of grief, its universal nature, and how the congregation might respond, the workshop turned its focus to how and why ritual might be used. The workshop participants agreed that a funeral should be an open and available service, but that a haphazard event could hinder participants comfort and therefore hinder the grief process. As such, it was reasonable to speak about how the service is kept from being chaotic and frustrated. This form is the concept of ritual. It was shared that ritual is a

word with which a variety of concepts, from the benign to the violent, is associated.

However, wherever personal experience and understanding falls between these two extremes, the ritual is still a framework of behavior. Merriam-Webster defines ritual as “the established form for a ceremony”.<sup>38</sup> It is a method by which the community can understand and demonstrate value. They are a set of actions ascribed by a faith or culture to guide participants through a stated circumstance. This is true to the Christian ritual of Communion, the ritual of the indigenous American's sweat lodges, or even the ritual of the American Pledge of Allegiance. The Society of Friends is a denomination that often speaks favorably about its lack of rituals, as the earlier statistic in the pre-questionnaire supported. So, in order to illustrate the value of the forms given by rituals at the workshop, the attendees were split into two groups. One group had to have one extra member. To each group was given an identical set of locking building blocks, as well as, a picture of a race car. Both groups were tasked with building the pictured car from the pieces provided. They were also told that their respective kits contained no extra parts or other deviations. The group with the less number of members was given a set of pictorial directions (i.e. ritual) for how to build the car in the picture. The two groups were given a time limit and the workshop leader let them go to work.

Throughout this time, the workshop leader listened and recorded, with the help of another individual, the running commentary in each group. As expected the group with the plans (i.e. ritual) for the practice of building a model race car was able to begin building with very little conversation. There was a fairly prompt division of labor along lines of experience and ability. After which time, the group began a steady pace to

---

<sup>38</sup>Merriam-Webster Online, “Ritual,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ritual> (accessed April 24, 2009).

building the required model. The conversation of this group was largely congenial and low-keyed. The other group however, even with numerically greater numbers, had a much harder time getting started. In the allotted fifteen minute time, this team restarted their efforts no less than five times. Also throughout the time, their conversation was marked by a number of more distressed commentary. There were statements of confusion (“I'm not sure this fits”), disbelief (“I know this for a fact – I think”), frustration (“This can't be right”), and concern (“We're still missing some pieces”).<sup>39</sup> Many of the groups comments could have a direct relation with similar feelings of trying to plan and build any structure, include that of funerary rites, without a plan.

When asked for feedback after the building example, many participants stated that the experience helped them with the concept of ritual and stated how it might be helpful when faced with a funeral. When pressed to explain more, one member said that having the instruction / ritual for an activity can be of particular help if a group is not certain what to do in a given circumstance. The leader remarked that this sounded like this was a truism that could be the case in some funeral experiences. Another attender who was in the group without instructions remarked that the group with the instructions appeared to be less stressed both during, as well as, after the experience. The individual continued by stating that if this is the case, then the individual wished that a similar circumstance was offered to family and friends at the individual's passing so as to reduce their stress. This is a factor that the leader of the workshop encouraged strongly. The workshop leader continued by stating that, just like the building blocks instruction, the funeral ritual of the church was a beginning building set. That, just as in the case of the model race car, a situation could be individually tailored to an individuals or group of

---

<sup>39</sup>A list of recorded comments made at this time can be found in Appendix G.

individual's preference by adding, removing, or reorganizing the pieces. However, by having a model plan to start from would give the organizer (and likely participants) a springboard from which to leap rather than entering the mourning waters unassisted. Taking an informal poll, the greater majority agreed that having a plan made sense to help negate fears and frustrations for those who are working through funerals. The two who did not agree stated that they were still thinking the situation over.

At the conclusion of the workshop, another questionnaire was distributed in order to gauge the response to the material presented. As a whole, the data and feedback in these forms is encouraging. Whereas previously the attendees preferred to attend calling hours than funerals (53.8% vs 28.5% respectively, with 7.7% unsure), after the workshop 84.6% said that they would either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' that they would prefer attending funerals over calling hours. This relative 56.1% increase represents a strong and effective heightening of the funeral's importance to the community within those gathered. On a related note, it also appears that those who attended the workshop are more likely to make an effort to attend funeral services. Thirty eight and a half percent said after the workshop that they were 'much more likely' to try to attend; with an identical 38.5% saying that they would try 'somewhat' harder for a combined percentage of 77%. While a handful (23.1%) did say that they expect no change in their effort to attend funerary services, according to the survey no one believed they would be less likely to attend such services after the workshop.

Similar increases in the statistics were seen when attendees were asked if they would be willing to attend funerals in the life of the congregation and community. This is important since this is the change that was hoped for in this project. For funerals of individual's own family members, the majority said that they saw 'no change' in their

expectation to attend these services. This level should not be surprising since originally, attendees only held that they would attend either 'strongly' (69.2%) or 'agreeing' (30.7%), with no one thinking that they would not attend. With such a strongly favorable beginning place, it is hard to imagine how much stronger attendance in the areas could rise. Moreover, a change in this ratio should not be expected because the content of the workshop was centered on congregational life and well-being not that of the family unit. As such is much less likely to have a direct affect on this statistic.

Focusing more on the relevant natures within the workshop, the statistics began to change as the focus moved further away from the individual's family. When speaking of proposed attendance for funerals of congregation members attested a stronger behavior – with 61.6% seeing an increase in their likely attendance. Even more remarkable is the 76.8% of attendees who say that they are more likely (in either somewhat or much more) than before to attend services for those family members with which they worship. This figure drops slightly to 69.3% who hold an increase for their attendance if one is speaking instead about an attendee's family rather than a congregation member's family. This is a marked distinction between those who are strongly tied to a congregation (member) and those lightly attached (attendee). However, the relatively low differential in these two statistics tells us that this could be only a limited difference in mental cognition. Lastly, the figure rockets up for those in the community to top out at 84.6% holding they are more likely to attend. There appears to be a strong positive correlation between this new awareness and in participation in the workshop. This is exactly what the workshop leader was hoping to encourage in the process for the attendees and their related congregations.

In addition to the change in willingness to attend services as noted earlier, there are two other strong changes that were gathered from the post-questionnaire that hint at a notable change in the attendees. First, in the pre-questionnaire a noteworthy majority (69.2%) said that they have spoken to their respective families about their funerary wishes. After the workshop, everyone in attendance noted that they were more likely to speak to their respective families about their funeral wishes. While this is certainly important for the attendee's personal and individual and familial lives, it is only secondary to the aims of the workshop and broader project. As such, perhaps even more interesting and relevant is that after the workshop, 84.6% of attendees (all but two) said that they were more likely to share with their spiritual families their desires for their funerals. This is remarkable since at the beginning of the workshop only one person stated that they had shared with their spiritual family any funeral wishes. To drive this point forward even stronger, two individuals from the workshop came to the author's office within five days of the workshop just so that they could share their arrangements and wishes. It appears that this connection between attendees of the workshop and their faith communities was strengthened in other ways, such as that an overwhelming majority stated that they would prefer their funerals, either for themselves or their loved ones, at places of worship rather than any other place.<sup>40</sup> Also there was a marked improvement in the opinion of ritual within the Church.

---

<sup>40</sup>One individual did remark that they would prefer only a graveside service at the conclusion of the workshop. It was the same individual who marked this who also in turn marked that they were less likely to attend funerals. This individual was also one of the two who marked both that they were 'undecided' if they were responsible for the quality of funerals, as well as, not making plans to speak with his / her spiritual family. It is also interesting to note that this one individual was the only participant to note that he attended worship less than once a month in the pre-questionnaire, as well as, other general negative comments. While the author wishes he would have been able to construct a workshop that spoke to all conditions, this individual's response to the program illustrates that this just is not the case. In a complex and often shadowy concept of death and funerals, it would seem inevitable for any discussions on the matter to elicit an adverse reaction from someone.

In addition to the numerical feedback on the questionnaires, there were also places for free responses by the individuals. Three individuals requested personal follow-up from the author / workshop leader in this section to speak more in-depth on the subject and their condition. In the open response section, the following statements were shared:

- Some form of “*well done workshop*” - five times.
- “*Due to this session, I feel we need a grief outreach committee to assist and participate in the funeral / rituals. Thank you.*”
- “*I needed to hear this because I find my discomfort has provided me an excuse to avoid attending funerals of congregation and friends. I feel that will change. I would love Ministry and Council to take up this topic as well as visitation for discussion & consideration for our Meeting.*”
- “*I / We generally do attend funerals / memorials for family members and for members of our congregation. The workshop stirred memories of personal grief. I / we are more included to make plans now for our memorial services.*”
- “*I would like to make arrangement to have my remains donated to science, and ashes eventual buried in [personal location].*”
- “*Our six year old son had a similar experience of your 8 year old when he was not included in viewing his grandma's body during the funeral service. This hasn't changed his perception of being in a Friends community, however it's something he still remembers. He is now 59 year old and has mentioned it recently.*”
- One participant made the enigmatic statement: “*Everyone grieves in their own way.*”
- And the one, potentially negative response: “*I'm not sure how responsible I am for the quality of funerals in my spiritual family. I don't plan the funerals, and often families will do what they want regardless of input from others. So I am leaning towards disagreeing with the statement and saying that I am not responsible.*”
- One response was blank.



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION**

This project has awakened an understanding within the author that he did not have prior to the undertaking. Being raised and ministering in a faith tradition that verbally downplays the importance of rituals and outward sacramental practice, he had little framework on which to base both his personal experience and ministerial experience. Having clearly understood rituals for funerary practices and sharing them with the congregation would appear to be one way to improve congregational spiritual health and hospitality. To reach this level of improved health, it is hoped that Church conferences and congregations across denominational lines might be encouraged to offer classes and workshops for how lay participation in rituals is important for the health of the congregation. The author certainly hope to continue his work in the field wherever he might be serving.

While the project focused primarily on the relationship with funeral rites of lay individuals within the congregation, the clergy also need to be aware of their responsibilities in this arena. Part of this responsibility must, by relation, fall upon the seminaries and other training institutions of the Christian Church. Prior to this study, the author had less than five weeks of formal instruction on funerals and related rites. Reflecting on what he viewed as a shortage after the fact, the author shared an informal

survey with some of the clergy serving his community. Out of the pool of fifteen individuals, only two said that they believed they had sufficient training when they completed their Master's level of education. The survey was able to make a fairly wide swath across denominations, for it included ministers from Presbyterian, Methodist, American Baptists, Quaker, Church of Christ, Church of God, Disciples of Christ, Lutheran, a Catholic deacon, and a number of ministers from independent congregations. It is interesting to note that those who stated they had enough education on the matter of funerary rites did not, in fact, have a Master's level of education in ministry. The majority of those surveyed stated that they only had one or two classes of which grieving and / or funerals were a part. Again, thirteen of those surveyed indicated a desire for more education (either in seminary or in continuing education). The author hopes that in the future there is an attempt to provide greater teaching and practical exercises within seminaries and Church conferences in funeral rites, and that, especially in the case of conferences, that this study is viewed as parallel and in addition to any training opportunities for the laity.

Frankly, it is not that the Society of Friends does not have any rituals, but rather that frequently (in the author's experience) they are not overtly taught or spoken of. Certainly the rather impartial to negative reactions which came from the survey indicate that this is likely not an isolated experience. However, since rituals are the plans by which a community undertakes a set function, they require communication in order to be effective. Therefore, when trying to understand and grapple with the place of death within the congregation, not speaking about funerary rites can be functionally the same as not having any funerary rites.

As reviewed earlier, the numbers, after a fairly short focus of a project, show a marked improvement within the views of attendees. The author does not believe that the work on the field has been exhausted by this project. The project, as outlined in this writing, does not establish the way, nor even the best way, to deal with congregational mourning rituals. Rather it is a way to start in this field. The main lesson the author has culled from this is not so much the methodology itself, but rather the need for open communication and continuing clarification on how the individual congregations and denominations struggle to meet the ministry at times of loss.

Certainly, the author does not believe that a congregation that grieves together can not nor will not have other problems. Even when they practice funerary rites as a spiritual family, the congregation's members can (and likely will in time) still disagree, argue, and frustrate each other. The hope of this practice is for simply one less source of stress on the congregation. Hopefully with additional work in this field, as well as, the multitude of other areas of congregational health, the Church can see clear into a future marked by Christian love and hospitality. To be ready for death in our own congregation, to be a non-anxious presence, resting on our rituals, Christians can begin to serve the rest of the culture in peace and harmony. In doing so, Christians might find one way to be a witness to Christ, God, and Holy Spirit to the postmodern world – focusing not on the morbid nature but helping individuals towards the well spring of life in faith. The author sincerely hopes that this project is only a spring board from which more work might be conducted in the future to the betterment of Christ's Church.

**APPENDIX A**

**SERMON: A BLUE CHRISTMAS**

- Have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!
  - And this is certainly a season to be merry
- Christmas is a joyous, happy holiday.
- At this time of year we celebrate the “good news of great joy,”
- that to us is born in Christ.
  - With the angels who give glory to God in the highest,
  - with the shepherds who return glorifying & praising,
  - with the wise men who rejoice exceedingly with great joy,
  - most of us get swept up in it all - in the joy of it all.
- Yes, Christmas is a joyous, happy holiday.
- That is true within the church.
  - But perhaps even more so,
    - it’s true in the culture around us.
- In our society, Christmas is expected to be a time of happiness and laughter,
  - a time for merriment and good cheer,
  - a time for blocking out--at least temporarily--
  - all the unpleasant and painful aspects of life.

- And so to the extent that we have been influenced by our culture, today's Gospel reading can be a bit of a shock.
- It seems to run counter to the mood of the season.
  - The death of Lazarus?
  - Jesus weeping?
  - Eh, can we go back to the happy stuff?
- The problem is that for so many people, the holidays are not just a time of happiness but also a time of pain, grief, frustration, and a host of other emotions.
- Elvis Presley once sang that: (Blue Christmas)
  - I'll have a Blue Christmas without you
  - I'll be so blue just thinking about you
  - Decorations of red on a green Christmas tree
  - Won't be the same dear, if you're not here with me
  - And when those blue snowflakes start falling
  - That's when those blue memories start calling
  - You'll be doin' all right, with your Christmas of white
  - But I'll have a blue, blue blue blue Christmas
- At the holidays – Thanksgiving, Christmas, & New Years - we experience more 'highs' and 'lows' emotionally than at any other time.
- There is more happiness as families get together and more suicides as families come apart.

- With all the pictures of 'ideal' Christmases, we can find ourselves looking around at this one and wonder – what's happening now?
- A year ago, my family was intact and happy (or so we thought) – this Christmas my nieces are without their mother and my brother is without his wife
  - It made singing “Joyful, Joyful” just a little odd
  - And mine is but one family – we have so many others racked with the pain of separation, divorce, death
- Have you ever come to watching a movie that has a New Years party with everyone smooching and you find yourself thinking: “I wish I had someone to kiss”
  - because your mate has left you
  - because your mate has passed away
  - because, well, what ever . . . .
- Grief and sadness are common emotions many of us feel at Christmas & the holidays.
  - Grief is the experience of loss we feel when someone / something we love is removed.
  - The loss may be of a loved one, a pet, a job, or opportunity, or community.
  - The pain is worse when others withdraw.

- For some here it may be their first Christmas out of work, or without a partner, or parent, or child...
- And so we have a blue Christmas or a Hard New Year
- When John was five years old, his dog dies, a dog that had become his special companion and with whom he spent many hours.
  - John was distraught, but his parents said 'We can buy another dog'.
  - The message: bury your feelings, and replace the loss as soon as possible.
- Later John's bike was stolen, and again he was told 'We'll get another bike.'
  - The message again: bury your feelings, replace the loss as soon as possible.
- As a teenager John had a gorgeous girlfriend but she jilted him for another guy.
  - His mother said: 'Don't feel sad; there are plenty of other fish in the sea!'
  - The message again: 'Don't feel sad; replace the loss as soon as possible.'
- One day the principal came to John's class to tell him his grandfather had died. John broke down in uncontrolled sobbing. His grandpa was his best friend, with whom he went fishing, with whom he talked often...
  - The teacher said John could go away for a while.
  - The message: 'Grieve alone. No more close relationships!'



- To those of you who grieve this Christmas:
  - God's way is to feel your feelings, to acknowledge and reflect on your loss, to grieve in community.
- If a friend or loved one is grieving, it is not usually wise to say things like 'It was God's will', 'He's better off now,' 'She had a full life', 'I understand how you feel.'
- No one really understands how another feels.
- Touch and presence is important when another is sad. Let them, grieve, let them cry.
- So this Christmas, I give you – and even more important – God gives you permission to feel your feelings:
- Whether that is the joy and wonder that the season brings out,
- or sadness and grief over a loss - to God and others.

**APPENDIX B**  
**WORKSHOP HANDOUT**

## Grief &amp; Funeral Workshop:

**Our Part in Grief**

Summer, 2009

**Nature of Grief**

***Man,  
when he does not grieve,  
hardly exists.***

*~Antonio Porchia,  
Voces, 1943,*

What is **grief**? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Where does it come from? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What are some common feelings when dealing with grief?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What are some memories you have of grieving?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What helped your experience(s) of grief and loss?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Grief can easily last for up to \_\_\_\_\_

but it is not uncommon to last \_\_\_\_\_.

Medicine can only \_\_\_\_\_ loss of an individual.

Grief is a \_\_\_\_\_ experience because we are \_\_\_\_\_.

What helps individuals and families cope with grief is:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Factors that inhibit coping with grief:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**How the congregation can influence the bereaved:**

1) \_\_\_\_\_

Benefits: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Detraction: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

Benefits: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Detraction: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

Benefits: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Detraction: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4) \_\_\_\_\_

Benefits: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Detraction: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Caring for the grieving implies what for the congregation?

1) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

With the above, it seems logical to focus on: \_\_\_\_\_

If: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### **Scripture & Grieving**

**“Rejoice with those who rejoice;  
 mourn with those who mourn.”**

*~ Letter to the Romans 12:15 (TNIV)*

Death & grieving is a

\_\_\_\_\_ theme in Scriptures.

### **Passages and Pertinent Information:**

1) *Genesis 50: 1-13* is the story of \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

2) *Luke 7: 11-17* is the story of \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

3) *Mark 16: 9-11* is the story of \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

4) *Jeremiah 14: 11-16* is odd (but supportive) because: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

*How does Scripture feel (in general) about funerals & public  
 grieving:* \_\_\_\_\_

### Modern Business

The funeral home, mortuary, crematoria, and monument dealers are all examples of: \_\_\_\_\_

**One cannot be deeply responsive to the world without being saddened very often.**

~Erich Fromm,  
psychologist & philosopher

As such, their primary concern is:

For congregations, the primary concern is:

Implications for funerals / memorials at:

Funeral Home

---

---

---

---

---

Places of Worship

---

---

---

---

---

**Two Stories** (*notes*):

### Ritual & Death

**Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak whispers the o'er-fraught heart and bids it break.**

~William Shakespeare *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, IV, iii

When I hear the word '*ritual*' I think:

---

---

---

What is a *ritual*?:

---

Do Friends have *rituals*? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the value of *ritual*? \_\_\_\_\_

Building Blocks Test: (notes)

The *understood ritual* also helps community bonding by:

Problems with funeral rites or any rituals: \_\_\_\_\_

### *A Communal Experience*

#### **Being prepared for the inevitable:**

**In three words I can  
sum up everything  
I've learned about  
life: it goes on.**

~ Robert Frost, poet

- 1) does the congregation have helpers on call?
- 2) is the local funeral homes familiar with the  
congregation's worship space & preferences
- 3) is there a facilitator in the congregation?
- 4) is music and other items available?

Why do we need an organist? (or, why is it important to sing?)

Example of Service:

**Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**

*There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under the heavens:  
a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,  
a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,  
a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to keep and a time to throw away,  
a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,  
a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.*

*Contact Matthew Zuehlke before reproducing  
in any format, print or electronic.*



**APPENDIX C**  
**WORKSHOP PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE**

## Pre-Questionnaire

### Background

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender** (circle one): Female Male

**Age** (circle one):

(up to 35)      (36 – 55)      (56 – 65)      (66 +)

**Family Religious Background** (where your family of origin attend):

Non-Christian(_____)	Quaker / Friends
Catholic / Orthodox	General Protestant
Holiness (pentecostal, etc.)	Baptist
Agnostic	Atheist

**Spiritual Practices:**

<i>I attend worship:</i>	3+ times a month
	1+ times a month
	less than 1 time a month
<i>Prayer:</i>	I pray daily.
	I pray weekly.
	I pray at worship only.
	I do not pray.

**How many funerals / memorials have you attended in your life?**

(less than 10)      (10 – 20)      (20 or more)

**How many funerals / memorials have you attended this year?**

(none)      (1 – 3)      (3 – 6)      (7 or more)

**Does your family of origin know of your funeral wishes?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Does your spiritual family know your funeral wishes?** \_\_\_\_\_

### Survey Questions

*For each of the following items, circle one answer as to how likely you would be to take part in the described activity from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. Try not to think too much on any one answer, but rather go with your first response, 'gut feeling', and / or recent behavior. There are no right or wrong answers.*

**I would prefer to attend calling / visiting hours at a funeral home than to attend a funeral / memorial service.**

strongly agree / agree / undecided / disagree / strongly disagree

**I would make an excuse in order to not attend a funeral.**

strongly agree / agree / undecided / disagree / strongly disagree

**I would go to the funeral of a family member.**

strongly agree / agree / undecided / disagree / strongly disagree

**I would go to the funeral of a congregation member.**

strongly agree / agree / undecided / disagree / strongly disagree

**I would go to the funeral of a congregation member's family.**

strongly agree / agree / undecided / disagree / strongly disagree

**I would go to the funeral of a congregation attendee's family.**

strongly agree / agree / undecided / disagree / strongly disagree

**I would go to the funeral of someone in the community.**

strongly agree / agree / undecided / disagree / strongly disagree

**I'm responsible for the quality of funerals in my spiritual family.**

strongly agree / agree / undecided / disagree / strongly disagree

**How do you feel when you hear the word “ritual”**

generally good                      indifferent                      generally poor

**To whom does the funeral most belong?**

Deceased                      bereaved                      community.

**Where do most funerals / memorials that you attend occur :**

funeral home                      graveside only                      place of worship

## **APPENDIX D**

### **PROFILE INVENTORY RESULTS OF WORKSHOP PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE**

### Pre-Questionnaire Responses:

The data collected is provided in the following format. For each category, the number of respondents is reported with the relative percentage that value presents. If an answer in a given category had no respondents, it was omitted in the data report.

<b>Gender:</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male:	3	23.1%
Female:	10	76.9%

<b>Age:</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
upto 35:	2	15.4%
35-55:	2	15.4%
56-65:	3	23.1%
66+ :	6	46.1%

<b>Family Religious Background:</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Quaker:	6	46.1%
Catholic:	1	7.7%
General Protestant:	6	46.1%

#### **Spiritual Practices:**

<b>I attend worship :</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
3+ times a month:	9	69.2%
1+ times a month:	3	23.1%
less than once a month:	1	7.7%

<b>Prayer Life:</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
individual prays daily:	10	76.9%
individual only prays at worship:	3	23.1%

<b>How many funerals / memorials have you attended in your life?</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
10-20:	4	30.7%
20+:	9	69.2%

<b>How many funerals / memorials have you attended this year?</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
none:	3	23.1%
1-3:	7	53.8%
3-6:	2	15.4%
7+:	1	7.7%

<b>Does your family of origin know of your funeral wishes?</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
yes:	9	69.2%
no:	4	30.7%

<b>Does your spiritual family know your funeral wishes?</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes:	1	7.7%
no:	12	92.3%

**I would prefer to attend calling / visiting hours at a funeral home than to attend a funeral / memorial service.**

	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
strongly agree::	3	23.1%
agree:	4	30.7%
undecided:	1	7.7%
disagree:	2	15.4%
strongly disagree:	3	23.1%

**I would make an excuse in order to not attend a funeral.**

	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
agree:	2	15.4%
undecided:	1	7.7%
disagree:	4	30.7%
strongly disagree:	6	46.1%

**I would go to the funeral of a family member.**

	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
strongly agree:	9	69.2%
agree:	4	30.7%

**I would go to the funeral of a congregation members.**

	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
strongly agree:	4	30.7%
agree:	9	69.2%

**I would go to the funeral of a congregation member's family.**

	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
agree:	6	46.1%
undecided:	6	46.1%
disagree:	1	7.7%

**I would go to the funeral of a congregation attendee's family.**

	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
agree:	6	46.1%
undecided:	6	46.1%
disagree:	1	7.7%

**I would go to the funeral of someone in the community.**

	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
strongly agree:	1	7.7%
agree:	5	38.5%
undecided:	6	46.1%
disagree:	1	7.7%

**I'm responsible for the quality of funerals in my spiritual family. #    Percentage**

agree:	3	23.1%
undecided:	5	38.5%
disagree:	5	38.5%

**How do you feel when you hear the word "*ritual*" #    Percentage**

good:	2	15.4%
indifferent:	7	53.8%
poor:	4	30.7%

**To whom does the funeral most belong? #    Percentage**

deceased:	1	7.7%
bereaved:	10	76.9%
community:	2	15.4%

**Where do most funerals / memorials that you attend occur : #    Percentage**

funeral home:	9	69.2%
place of worship:	4	30.7%



**APPENDIX E**  
**WORKSHOP POST-QUESTIONNAIRE**

## Post-Questionnaire

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

(allows workshop leader to compare questionnaire responses)

### Survey Questions

*For each of the following items, circle one answer as to how likely you would be to take part in the described activity after today's workshop. Scale your answers between: "much more likely" to "much less likely". Again, there are no right or wrong answers.*

**I would prefer to attend funeral / memorial service rather than only attending calling / visiting hours at a funeral home .**

much more likely / somewhat more / no change / less likely

**I would make an effort to attend a funeral.**

much more likely / somewhat more / no change / less likely

**I would go to the funeral of a family member.**

much more likely / somewhat more / no change / less likely

**I would go to the funeral of a congregation members.**

much more likely / somewhat more / no change / less likely

**I would go to the funeral of a congregation member's family.**

much more likely / somewhat more / no change / less likely

**I would go to the funeral of a congregation attendee's family.**

much more likely / somewhat more / no change / less likely

**I would go to the funeral of someone in the community.**

much more likely / somewhat more / no change / less likely

**I'm responsible for the quality of funerals in my spiritual family.**

strongly agree / agree / undecided / disagree / strongly disagree

**Will you / are you more likely to share wishes:**

*with your family of origin?*    yes    no    undecided

*with spiritual family?*        yes    no    undecided

**Is it safe / healthy for an individual to grieve alone?**

no

doesn't matter

yes

**Where would you most prefer funerals / memorials for you and your loved ones to happen?**

funeral home

graveside only

place of worship

**Has your feeling of the word “ritual”, as pertaining to funerals / memorials, improved?**

generally improved / somewhat improved / no change / decreased

## **APPENDIX F**

### **PROFILE INVENTORY RESULTS OF WORKSHOP POST-QUESTIONNAIRE**

### Post-Questionnaire Responses:

The data collected is provided in the following format. For each category, the number of respondents is reported with the relative percentage that value presents. If an answer in a given category had no respondents, it was omitted in the data report.

#### **I would prefer to attend funeral / memorial service rather than only attending**

<b>calling / visiting hours at a funeral home .</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
much more likely:	6	46.1%
somewhat more:	5	38.5%
no change:	1	7.7%
less likely:	1	7.7%

#### **I would make an effort to attend a funeral.**

	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
much more likely	5	38.5%
somewhat more	5	38.5%
no change	3	23.1%

#### **I would go to the funeral of a family member**

	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
much more likely	2	15.4%
somewhat more	2	15.4%
no change	9	69.2%

#### **I would go to the funeral of a congregation members.**

	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
much more likely	5	38.5%
somewhat more	3	23.1%
no change	5	38.5%

#### **I would go to the funeral of a congregation member's family.**

	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
much more likely	4	30.7%
somewhat more	6	46.1%
no change	3	23.1%

#### **I would go to the funeral of a congregation attendee's family.**

	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
much more likely	2	15.4%
somewhat more	7	53.9%
no change	4	30.7%

<b>I would go to the funeral of someone in the community.:</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
much more likely	2	15.4%
somewhat more	9	69.2%
no change	2	15.4%

<b>I'm responsible for the quality of funerals in my spiritual family. #</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
strongly agree	2 15.4%
agree	8 69.2%
undecided	2 15.4%

**Will you / are you more likely to share wishes:**

*with your family of origin? # Percentage*

yes: 13 100%

*with spiritual family? # Percentage*

yes: 11 84.6%

no: 2 15.4%

<b>Is it safe / healthy for an individual to grieve alone?</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
no:	11	84.6%
doesn't matter:	2	15.4%

**Where would you most prefer funerals / memorials for you**

<b>and your loved ones to happen?</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
graveside:	1	7.7%
place of worship:	12	92.3%

**Has your feeling of the word "ritual", as pertaining to funerals / memorials, improved?**

<b>#</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
generally improved:	6 46.1%
somewhat:	6 46.1%
no change:	1 7.7%

**APPENDIX G**

**A LIST OF COMMENTS SHARED**

**DURING THE RITUAL EXERCISE**

- I'm not sure this fits.
- Let's do this by process of elimination.
- I know this for a fact, I think.
- Did we give you the wrong piece?
- It didn't fit.
- It looks like it fits.
- We have to think not on such a grand scale.
- We're still missing something.
- Here's another option – let's ignore this part.
- After another five hours and we maybe halfway done.
- We've got some structural issues.
- We're just the parts department.
- We've got to have something to follow that up.
- If we don't have a place for this yet, I'm concerned. It's one of the larger pieces.
- We went ahead and just stuck it on.
- This can't be right.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Bernhard W. *Understanding the Old Testament*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998.
- Aries, Philippe. *Western Attitudes Towards Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*. Translated by Patricia M. Ranum. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.
- Arnold, Eberhard, ed. *The Early Christians: In Their Own Words*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Farmington, PA: Plough Publishing House, 1997.
- Baars, Bernard, ed. *Experimental Slips and Human Error: Exploring the Architecture of Volition*. New York, NY: Plenum Publishers, 1992.
- Bach, Karl and others. *Songs of the Spirit*. Philadelphia, PA: Friends General Conference Press, 1978.
- Baisley, Phil. "Work of the Pastor." Master of Divinity course work, Earlham School of Religion, Richmond, IN, March 2004.
- Balch, David L. and Carolyn Osiek, eds. *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003.
- Barbour, Hugh and J. William Frost. *The Quakers*. Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1988.
- Blackwood, Andrew Watterson. *The Funeral: A Source Book for Ministers*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1942.
- Bregman, Lucy. *Death and Dying, Spirituality and Religions: A Study of the Death Awareness Movement*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2003.
- Boyer, Pascal. *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.
- Bushnell, Horace. *Christian Nurture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989.

- CBS News. "Economic Storm Batters Ohio Town." <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/01/22/60minutes/main4747832.shtml> (accessed Jan 30, 2009).
- Cieslak, William. *Console One Another: Commentary on the Order of Christian Funerals*. Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1990.
- Cole Jr., Allan Hugh. *Be Not Anxious: Pastoral Care of Disquieted Souls*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008.
- Comforting Children in Crisis*. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, Inc., 2009.
- Community: Discovering Who We Are Together*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004.
- Culbertson, Philip. *Caring for God's People: Counseling and Christian Wholeness*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.
- Davies, Jon. *Death, Burial, and Rebirth in the Religions of Antiquity*. London, England: Routledge, 1999.
- Dawn, Marva. *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology for This Urgent Time*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.
- Driver, Tom F. *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998.
- Economagic.com. "Economic Time Series Page." <http://www.economagic.com/em-cgi/date.exe/blsla/lauMC39489403> (accessed February 1, 2009).
- Elliott, Lynda D. *The Counsel of a Friend: 12 Ways to Put Your Caring Heart into Action*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993.
- Fackre, Gabriel. *The Church: Signs of the Spirit and Signs of the Times – The Christian Story, A Pastoral Systematics*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007.
- Faith and Practice of the Wilmington Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Book of Discipline)*. Dublin, IN: Prinit Press, 1977.
- Farabaugh, Timothy M. *Lay Pastoral Care Giving*. Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2009.
- Feinberg, Linda. *I'm Grieving as Fast as I Can: How Young Widows and Widowers Can Cope and Heal*. Far Hills, NJ: New Horizon Press, 1994.
- Fowler, Gene. *Caring Through the Funeral: A Pastor's Guide*. St Louis. MO: Chalice Press, 2004.

- Fowler, James W. *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.
- Garland, Robert. *The Greek Way of Death*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Gies, Joseph and Frances Gies. *Life in a Medieval Village*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1990.
- Griffin, Emilie and Douglas Steere. *Quaker Spirituality: Selected Writings*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2005.
- Halverson, Delia. *The Gift of Hospitality: In Church, In the Home, In All of Life*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1999.
- Harris, Mark. *Grave Matters: A Journey Through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2007.
- Hoffacker, Charles. *A Matter of Life and Death: Preaching at Funerals*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publication, 2002.
- Howe, Leroy. *Angry People in the Pews: Managing Anger in the Church*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2001.
- Hudson, Jill M. *Congregational Trauma: Caring, Coping, & Learning*. n.p.: The Alban Institute, 1998.
- Huntington, Richard and Peter Metcalf. *Celebrations of Death: the Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Jupp, Peter C., ed. *Death Our Future: Christian Theology and Pastoral Practice in Funeral Ministry*. London: Epworth, 2008.
- Kalish, Richard A. and David K. Reynolds. *Death and Ethnicity: A Psychocultural Study*. Los Angeles, CA: The University of Southern California Press, 1976.
- Keck, Leander E. *New Interpreter's Bible: Genesis to Leviticus (Volume 1)*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994.
- Kelly, Ewan. *Meaningful Funerals: Meeting the Theological and Pastoral Challenge in a Postmodern Era*. New York, NY: Mowbray, 2008.
- Kerrigan, Michael. *The History of Death: Burial Customs and Funeral Rites, From the Ancient World to Modern Times*. Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2007.
- Killen, James L. *Pastoral Care in the Small Membership Church*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005.

Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth. *Death: The Final Stage of Growth*. New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1975.

\_\_\_\_\_. *On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy, and Their Own Families*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1997.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Wheel of Life: A Memoir of Living and Dying*. New York: Scribner, 1997.

Laderman, Gary. *Rest in Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Lamm, Maurice. *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*. New York, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 2000.

Laungani, Pittu. "Death in a Hindu Family." In *Death and Bereavement Across Cultures*, ed. Colin Murray Parkes, Pittu Laungani, and Bill Young, 52-72. London, England: Routledge, 1997.

Levang, Elizabeth. *When Men Grieve: Why Men Grieve Differently and How You Can Help*. Minneapolis, MN: Fairview Press, 1998.

Lloyd, Dan S. *Leading Today's Funerals: A Pastoral Guide for Improving Bereavement Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997.

MacGregor, Geddes. *Images of Afterlife: Beliefs from Antiquity to Modern Times*. New York, NY: Paragon House, 1992.

McBee, Patricia, ed. *Grounded in God: Care and Nurture in Friends Meeting*. Philadelphia, PA: Quaker Press, 2002.

Members of Wilmington Friends Meeting. Interview by Matthew Zuehlke. Wilmington, OH, 2007.

Merriam-Webster Online. "Ritual." <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ritual> (accessed April 24, 2009).

Meyers, Carol, ed. *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000.

Mitchell, Kenneth R. and Herbert Anderson. *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs: Resources for Pastoral Care*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983.

Moltmann, Jurgen. *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.

- New Interpreter's Bible: Isaiah through Ezekiel (Volume 6)*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001.
- New Interpreter's Bible: Kings through Judith (Volume 3)*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999.
- Newsom, Carol A. and Sharon H. Ringe, eds. *The Women's Bible Commentary*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992.
- Noren, Carol M. *In Times of Crisis and Sorrow: A Minister's Manual Resource Guide*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.
- Paxton, Frederick S. *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Percept Group, Inc. "First View 2008 for Zip Code 45177, Wilmington, OH." Percept Group. [www.perceptgroup.com](http://www.perceptgroup.com) (accessed December 13, 2007).
- Peterson, Eugene H., Calvin Miller and others. *Weddings, Funerals & Special Events*. Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1987.
- Pine, Vanderlyn R. and other, eds. *Acute Grief and the Funeral*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas, 1976.
- Podhoretz, Norman. *The Prophets: Who They Were, What They Are*. New York: The Free Press, 2002.
- Pogue, Carolyn. *Language of the Heart: Rituals, Stories, and Information About Death*. Louisville, Quebec: Northstone Publishing, 1997.
- Population Finder. "Zip Code Tabulation Area 45177." U.S. Census Bureau. [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFPopulation\\_event=Search&name=45177&\\_state=&\\_county=&\\_cityTown=&\\_zip=45177&\\_sse=on&\\_lang=en&pctxt=fph](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFPopulation_event=Search&name=45177&_state=&_county=&_cityTown=&_zip=45177&_sse=on&_lang=en&pctxt=fph) (accessed August 24, 2008).
- Project Wittenberg. "An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility by Martin Luther (1483-1546)." Walther Library. <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/web/nblty-03.html> (accessed March 3, 2009).
- Punshon, John. *Portrait in Grey: A Short History of the Quakers*. London: Quaker Home Service, 1991.
- Quaker Faith & Practice: The Book of Christian Discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain*. Warwick: Warwick Printing Company Limited, 1995.

- Quivik, Melinda A. *A Christian Funeral: Witness to the Resurrection*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005.
- Ramshaw, Elaine. *Ritual and Pastoral Care*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987.
- Ranke-Heinemann. *Putting Away Childish Things*. Translated by Peter Heinegg. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994.
- Rauschenbusch, Walter. *A Theology for the Social Gospel*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.
- Roach, Mary. *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004.
- Roetzel, Calvin J. *The World that Shaped the New Testament*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1985.
- Rozwaski, Chaim Z. *Jewish Meditation on the Meaning of Death*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1994.
- Savage, John. *Listening and Caring Skills: A Guide for Groups and Leaders*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- Schaus, Margaret. *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2006.
- Schultz, Thom and Joani Schultz. *The Dirt on Learning: Groundbreaking Tools to Grow Faith in Your Church*. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 1999.
- Searl, Edward. *In Memoriam: A Guide to Modern Funeral and Memorial Services*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Boston: Skinner House Books, 2000.
- Sheppy, Paul. *In Sure and Certain Hope: Liturgies, Prayer and Readings for Funerals and Memorials*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003.
- Silverman, Janis. *Help Me Say Goodbye: Activities for Helping Kids Cope When a Special Person Dies*. Minneapolis: Fairview Press, 1999.
- Sinclair, N. Duncan. *Horrific Traumata: A Pastoral Response to the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*. New York, NY: Haworth Pastoral Press, 1993.
- Smith, Harold Ivan. *A Long-Shadowed Grief: Suicide and its Aftermath*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2006.
- Smith, Margaret. *Facing Death Together: Parish Funerals*. Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998.

- Stanley, Andy and Lane Jones. *Communicating for a Change*. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2006.
- Stowers, Stanley K. *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, & Gentiles*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994.
- Wallis, Charles L., ed. *The Funeral Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992.
- Washington, A.D. "The New Jerusalem: A Biblical Model of Deconstruction and Reconstruction to Create the 'Ideal Church.'" D.Min. project, United Theological Seminary, 2007.
- Weaver, Andrew J. and Howard W. Stone, eds. *Reflections on Grief and Spiritual Growth*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005.
- White, James F. *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000.
- Wiersbe, Warren and David Wiersbe. *Ministering to the Mourning: A Practical Guide for Pastors, Church Leaders, and Other Caregivers*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2006.
- Willcuts, Jack. *Why Friends are Friends: Some Quaker Core Convictions*. Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 2002.
- Willhite, Keith and Aubrey Malphurs, eds. *A Contemporary Handbook for Weddings and Funerals and Other Occasions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2003.
- Willis, G. G. *A History of Early Roman Liturgy: To the Death of Pope Gregory the Great*. London: The Boydell Press, 1994.
- Wolfelt, Alan D. *Healing Your Grieving Heart for Teens: 100 Practical Ideas*. Fort Collins, CO: Companion Press, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Helping Children Cope with Grief*. New York: Routledge, 1983.
- Worden, J. William. *Grief Counseling & Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, Inc., 2008.
- Zuehlke, Matthew. "Have Mercy on Me, O God." Sermon, Wilmington Friends Meeting, Wilmington, OH, August 2, 2009.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Lord is My Shepherd." Sermon, Wilmington Friends Meeting, Wilmington, OH, July 19, 2009.